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trading standards law explained

Second-hand upholstered furniture: fire safety

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

Upholstered furniture is subject to stringent safety standards. The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988* cover the flammability of upholstered furniture (which includes beds, sofa beds, cushions and mattresses). Both new and used furniture has to comply.

[*These Regulations were amended in October 2025 by the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 2025.]

In general, the safety provisions require that upholstery must pass the cigarette test, fillings must be fire retardant and the covers must pass the match test. Upholstered furniture and mattresses that meet the requirements of the Regulations must carry permanent labels (with a few exceptions).

Fire safety

Under the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, used furniture must meet the same stringent standards as new furniture on sale in the shops.

The Regulations apply to furniture that is intended for private use indoors, including beds, divans, sofa beds, cushions, mattresses and pillows. They also cover outdoor furniture that is suitable for indoor use (such as upholstered dining sets for use in conservatories and gardens).

As stated above, the safety provisions require that upholstery must pass the cigarette test, fillings must be fire retardant and the covers must pass the match test. However, some of these requirements are relaxed or varied for mattresses, bed bases, pillows, cushions and insulated bags for carrying infants under the age of six months.

The following are excluded from the controls:

- furniture made before 1 January 1950
- materials for upholstery of furniture made before 1 January 1950
- goods for export

How to tell whether furniture complies

New upholstered furniture, apart from the exemptions mentioned above, must carry a permanent label with the heading 'CARELESSNESS CAUSES FIRE'. This label is usually found behind a loose cover at the rear of the furniture or under a seat cushion. It will contain the details, including a batch code, that allow it to be traced to the manufacturer in case any issues are found with the safety of its production.

Whilst the law does not specifically state that this permanent label needs to be stitched in, this is the best way in which to ensure that it is the original label that was supplied when the furniture was manufactured.

It is best practice to carry out further checks on permanent labels that have been stapled on to the furniture in order to ensure that the information is correct, as these labels may have been added at any time. In the case of mattresses, look for a label stating compliance with British Standard BS 7177:2008+A1:2011 - *Specification for resistance to ignition of mattresses, mattress pads, divans and bed bases*.

Any items not bearing this labelling may not comply, and you are advised not to sell them until you have obtained expert advice (from the original manufacturer, for example). Any furniture that cannot be verified as 'safe' via the details on the permanent label needs to be disposed of at a waste recycling centre.

The 'New upholstered furniture: fire safety' guide contains more detailed information on the labelling requirements for new products.

Other safety requirements

In addition to the specific rules on flammability, furniture must be safe in all other respects - for example, free from sharp edges and splinters.

The general safety requirement is imposed by the General Product Safety Regulations 2005 (GPSR). For more information, see 'General product safety: producers' and 'General product safety: distributors'.

The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 were amended in October 2025 to remove certain baby products from their scope; these types of products that were placed on the market after this date will not comply specifically with the Regulations; to be considered safe, they must instead comply with the GPSR.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

Updated to cover the changes made by the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 2025. The requirement for display labelling has been removed, and pushchairs, carry cots, baby walkers, etc no longer fall under the definition of upholstered furniture.

Last reviewed / updated: October 2025

Key legislation

- Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988
- General Product Safety Regulations 2005
- Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 2025

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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