

Are household appliances really safe for all consumers?

Consumers expect electrical household appliances to be safe, for themselves, their children and the older members of their families. Regulators want a high level of health and safety protection for all consumers, as expressed in European Directives. However, in the case of electrical household appliances, these principles are undermined by the EN60335 series of standards used to support legislation, which have an exclusion or limitation clause that the standard “... does not, in general, take into account the use of appliances by young children or infirm persons without supervision.”



What is EN 60335?

The EN 60335 series of standards cover the safety of electrical household appliances, such as microwave ovens, washing machines and toasters. These standards were initially written in a social and educational context that assumed that children and “infirm people” typically do not use the products covered by its scope without supervision. However, 20 years later, research commissioned by ANEC, the UK Department of Trade and Industry, and by consumer representation in the British and German standards organisations has shown that children and older and disabled people do use household electric appliances for their intended purpose and often without supervision.

Why is it discriminatory?

For many years ANEC and other consumer organisations have been concerned about the limited scope of these standards. The standards currently exclude the use of electrical household appliances by a substantial group of consumers- children and infirm persons. We believe this is discriminatory. We have asked for the deletion of this exclusion clause, against strong opposition from industry. An ANEC study from 2004 also highlighted a legal gap between the standard and European safety legislation.



How should it change?

The needs of children and of elderly and disabled people should be recognised in the EN 60335 series of standards. Manufacturers and standards makers nowadays have the technical knowledge to review the design of products and their standards, to ensure that they are safe for use by all consumers. For example, access to dangerous live and moving parts by children’s fingers can be minimised by appropriate safety standards. Surface temperatures can be lowered to a safer level for children and older people and instructions for use can be more legible. Similarly in recent years, guidance has been developed to assist standardisation committees to address the needs of children and of older and disabled people.

What is ANEC doing?

ANEC commissioned a research project in 2005 with proposals for changes to the standards for toasters, microwave ovens, hobs and ovens, hairdryers, water heaters, lawnmowers and trimmers, and grills and similar portable cooking appliances. These results reflect the fact that children may be less careful when using the appliances and more easily distracted. Older people are more likely to have visual, hearing, dexterity and mobility impairments which can affect their ability to use the appliances.

ANEC is submitting these proposals to the newly established working group on this issue (CENELEC TC 61 WG 4), and is working on other products that need to be revised. It was on ANEC’s demand that this working group was set up. As a result of several years of lobbying by ANEC, the European Commission has now issued a standardisation mandate to support this group’s work.



ANEC in brief

ANEC is the European consumer voice in standardisation, representing and defending consumer interests in standardisation and certification. It is a federation of national consumer organisations of all EU Member States and EFTA countries. ANEC is funded by the European Commission and EFTA, with consumer organisations contributing in kind.

Consumer participation in standardisation is crucial. Consumer representation counterbalances the industry view, and goods and services based on standards developed with consumer participation may be more easily accepted in the market place. In the EU context, consumers ensure that the public interest is represented in standardisation work that complements European legislation under the New Approach to Technical Regulation.

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What can you do to help?

ANEC is of the opinion that electrical products should be safe for all consumers and calls for the revision of relevant standards. ANEC urges organisations for consumers and also for people with disabilities to actively lobby their national standards bodies to support consumer views in the newly created CENELEC TC 61 WG 4. A complete list of CENELEC members is available at www.cenelec.org



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