



Press Release

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Cashing in the consumer protection dividend

To mark International Consumers Day, ANEC calls for European safety legislation to provide consumers with a system of protection they can trust. This entails ensuring the safety of products along the whole production chain, from the assessment of risks to which all categories of consumers are exposed, to effective checks on products before they are sold to consumers.

Stephen Russell, ANEC Secretary-General, said: "In times of reduced public budgets, it is essential to ensure resources are appropriately and effectively used to protect and benefit all consumers. And while safety is a right and a legitimate consumer expectation, it is also an investment: the 'safety dividend' benefits consumers, public authorities and industry alike."

He added: "As demonstrated by the scandal of the PIP breast implants¹, European safety legislation, based on the principles of the "New Approach" and CE Marking, still fails to provide consumers with the high safety levels they are entitled to expect. Even when CE Marking is underpinned by the independent assessment of a notified body, such as in the case of breast implants, it cannot be a guarantee of a legal product (let alone a safe product) due to the variations in the quality of notified bodies. Once more, ANEC must repeat its serious reservations about CE Marking, as CE Marking is often perceived as a safety mark. We encourage the European Institutions, now considering a strengthening of market surveillance in line with our calls for a European framework², to expedite their efforts to achieve a more effective system of surveillance and enforcement".

Moreover, the trend in consumer policy towards "consumer empowerment" should be complemented by a real empowerment of the public authorities and consumer associations, at national and European levels, entrusted with the task of consumer protection.

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¹ SCENHIR report (<http://tinyurl.com/6twyr5o>)

² ANEC/BEUC position on revision GPSD directive (<http://www.anec.eu/attachments/ANEC-GA-2010-G-001final.pdf>)

ANEC believes that having sufficient and adequate knowledge about the safety of products consumers intend to buy and use, is an essential consumer need. Information should be reliable, understandable and transparent. Warnings should be complementary to strict safety measures and must not exonerate manufacturers from ensuring that products do not present a risk to consumers, especially when those consumers are children, people with disabilities and the elderly.

Market surveillance authorities and consumer associations need sufficient resources to enforce safety requirements³. This is of utmost importance if policymakers really want to meet the challenges posed by the growing elderly population in order to improve opportunities for “active ageing” and for living independently⁴.

Stephen Russell concluded: “The empowerment of consumers must not replace the protection of all consumers, regardless of age or ability”.

³ ANEC position on the vulnerable consumers (<http://www.anec.eu/attachments/ANEC-CHILD-2011-G-111final>)

⁴ 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (<http://europa.eu/ey2012>)

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ANEC in brief

Raising standards for consumers

ANEC is the European consumer voice in standardisation, defending consumer interests in the processes of technical standardisation and conformity assessment as well as related legislation and public policies. ANEC was established in 1995 as an international non-profit association under Belgian law and represents consumer organisations from 31 European countries. ANEC is funded by the European Union and EFTA, with national consumer organisations contributing in kind. Its Secretariat is based in Brussels.

More information: www.anec.eu

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