

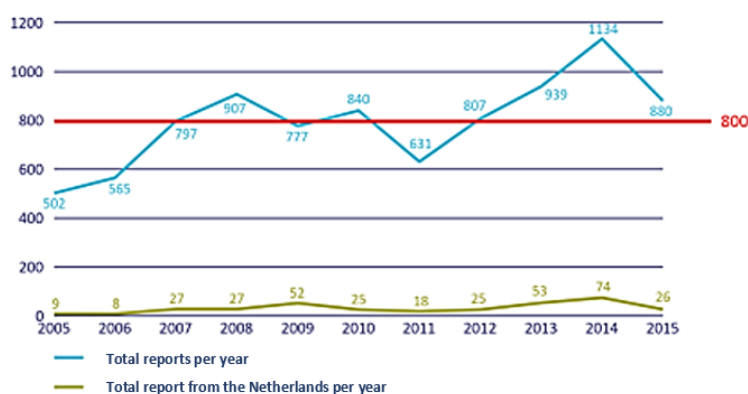


EUROLAB Special Briefing

Unravel the system behind CE marking: European logo does not say much about the safety of non-food products

The Netherlands Court of Audit conducted an audit on the European system of CE marking and published a report on 19 January 2017. The report indicates that dozens of products bearing a CE marking are taken off the market every year because they present a risk to consumers. The findings from the report are the following:

The report indicates that consumers buying a toy car, contact lenses, a smartphone or a bicycle helmet with the letters CE on it cannot assume that the product is safe, healthy or environmentally friendly. The system of CE marking is not watertight. Also, a CE marking is not a quality label. Manufacturers are themselves responsible for placing the CE marking on products, and for producing a declaration of conformity stating that the products meet EU health and safety requirements. On average, 800 products subject to the CE system have to be withdrawn from the European market every year because they are neither safe nor healthy.



CE marking is compulsory for countless non-food products throughout the EU and in Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. It is also used in Switzerland and Turkey. The audit, entitled 'Unravel the system behind CE marking: not watertight' asked why hundreds of products have to be withdrawn from the market every year because they pose a grave risk to the health and safety of users, even though they carry a CE logo. In its search for an answer, the Court of Audit investigated a system that is designed to serve both economic and public interests. These interests do not always coincide.

Passport to the European market

CE marking is not a quality label. First of all, it is a passport enabling a product to be traded freely on the European market. Secondly, the system is designed to serve the public interest. Manufacturers and traders are responsible for ensuring compliance with the rules on CE marking. They play a key role in the system; consumers and professional users are not generally involved. The system is supervised by the national authorities in Europe.

In the Netherlands, products are supervised by five national inspectorates, each of 2 which has a wide range of tasks. Staff and resources for enforcing compliance with the CE rules are limited, however, and the five inspectorates report separately on their work. Parliament cannot therefore build up a general picture of how the system works in

practice. This frustrates democratic control. In Europe, each individual country is responsible for supervision. The Court of Audit found significant differences between countries' approaches and the number of inspectors deployed. 'These differences can lead to inequality before the law,' the report states.

Data systems open to improvement

The Court of Audit recommends that supervision be strengthened, in part by promoting national and international cooperation and by involving users more closely. After all, they are the first to notice whether or not a product works properly. The use of information systems is also open to improvement. The Court believes the 'dynamic and international trade in products' justifies the interconnection of data systems and their use in order to produce more accurate analyses and improve the exchange of information on substandard products. 'A different approach to supervision, making better and smarter use of the available data,' could be the answer, the Court claims in its report.

The Minister of Economic Affairs, who coordinates the system of CE marking, sees this recommendation as reflecting support for his policy. The five national inspectorates responsible for CE policy already cooperate in a 'market regulation alliance'. The alliance works nationally and internationally on initiatives to involve consumers and professional users more closely in checks of product safety. The Minister also promised to inform parliament and the European Commission about the operation of the CE system every four years.

The Court of Audit is planning to share its audit findings with the supreme audit institutions in the European Union as a means of encouraging them to carry out similar audits. This would produce a broader picture of the functioning of the CE system in Europe. The Court is preparing a conference with this in mind, which 12 audit institutions from EU member states have already said they will attend.

To access the full report in Dutch:

http://www.rekenkamer.nl/Publicaties/Onderzoeksrapporten/Introducties/2017/01/Producten_op_de_Europese_markt_CE_markering_ontrafeld

Sources:

Unravel the system behind CE marking: not watertight:

http://www.courtofaudit.nl/english/Latest_News/All_newsitems/2017/01/Unravel_the_system_behind_CE_marking_not_watertight

Products sold on the European market: unraveling the system of CE marking:

http://www.courtofaudit.nl/english/Publications/Audits/Introductions/2017/01/Products_sold_on_the_European_market_unraveling_the_system_of_CE_marking

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