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RAPEX in 2013

1. What is RAPEX?

RAPEX is the European rapid alert system for dangerous products. It ensures that information about dangerous products withdrawn from the market and/or recalled from consumers anywhere in Europe is quickly circulated between Member States and the European Commission, so that appropriate action can be taken everywhere in the EU. **Thirty-one countries** currently participate in the system. Croatia has joined RAPEX as from 1 July 2013. The participating countries are all the European Union countries and the EFTA/EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

What type of measures can be taken?

The most common measures are: ban/stop on sales; withdrawal of a dangerous product from the market or its recall from consumers; and import rejection by the customs authorities.

What is covered by RAPEX?

The scope of RAPEX covers dangerous **non-food products** intended for consumers (e.g. a toy, a cosmetic, clothing) and for professionals (e.g. a power drill, a machine, a construction product) which pose a serious risk to the health and safety of consumers (risks of injuries, chemical risks, etc.), as well as to various public interests, such as 'environment' (risk for trees, water, air, soil, etc. from dangerous chemicals contained in a product), 'health and safety at the workplace' and 'public security'.

The RAPEX system covers the **majority of non-food products**. Other categories of non-food products, such as pharmaceuticals and medical devices, are covered by other specific alert systems.

What are obligations of national authorities?

National authorities ensure that businesses respect their obligation to place only safe products on the market. They must designate authorities which can take measures to prevent or restrict the marketing or use of dangerous products. Each country designates a national [RAPEX Contact Point](#) which coordinates the system at national level and submits information to the Commission about dangerous products found on its own market. The information received as 'notifications' and validated by the Commission is rapidly circulated to the national Contact Points for appropriate action. The results of these follow up activities are reported back through the system through so called 'reactions'.

What are the obligations of producers?

Producers (i.e. manufacturers and importers) are responsible for placing only safe products on the market. Once aware that a product is dangerous, a producer must immediately take measures to prevent further risks to consumers. National competent authorities must also be informed about the safety problem, clearly identifying the product in question, the risks it poses and the information necessary to trace it. This information is then conveyed via the RAPEX system to the Commission and other countries participating in the RAPEX system if the product poses a serious risk.

2. RAPEX in 2013

What were the most significant developments in 2013?

2013 is the 10-year anniversary of RAPEX. From a few hundred notifications a year the system now receives in excess of 2000 notifications.

Overall, in these 10 years, RAPEX successfully contributed to the protection of European consumers, with a total of over **16 600 notifications sent** on dangerous products by the Member States.

The **main achievements in 2013** were:

- More notifications on dangerous products;
- Earlier detection;
- Better market surveillance and product safety enforcement by national authorities, including through specific projects;
- Growth in the number of follow up actions to RAPEX notifications;
- Better risk assessment by authorities;
- Improved traceability (less products with unknown origin);
- More focus on quality and usefulness of notifications;
- Growing co-operation with customs authorities;
- Continued network-building and training coordinated by the European Commission.

In 2013, with financial support from the Commission, market surveillance authorities across the EU have continued their joint efforts to improve cooperation on enforcing product safety rules and taking effective action against dangerous and non-compliant products. Under the umbrella of the Product Safety Enforcement Forum of Europe (Prosafe), the projects focused on child-care articles, fireworks, lawn mowers and battery chargers have been implemented and accomplished. Some other projects (i.e. high chairs, cords and drawstrings in clothes) are ongoing. In early 2014, new joint actions were inaugurated on toys, childcare articles (cots and carry cots), kick scooters, chemicals in textiles, and smoke detectors.

Customs authorities are increasingly involved in product safety surveillance and the number of measures initiated by the border controls and notified in RAPEX has risen steadily over the past few years. In 2012, 11% of compulsory measures were taken by customs. This has risen to 13% in 2013.

What were the main findings in 2013?

In 2013, a total of 2.364 notifications on dangerous products were submitted through the RAPEX system by Member States. This constitutes 3.8% more notifications than in 2012. Of the 2.364 notifications, 1.981 notifications concerned products which posed a serious risk to consumers. The remaining notifications refer to moderate/low risk or were transmitted for information only (with the possibility of, but not the obligation to, follow up).

Why did the number of notifications for dangerous goods increase in 2013?

With the exception of 2011, the number of RAPEX notifications has had a steady upward trend with a number of notifications around 2000 every year.

This increase testifies to the determination of the Member State authorities and the Commission to remain vigilant and pro-active in the protection of consumer safety. The increase in the number of notifications means safer consumers since more dangerous products have been removed from the EU market.

The **RAPEX system has now reached a level of stability and maturity** and the more active use of the risk assessment guidelines has led to improvements in the quality and completeness of the notifications. Also, the continuously improved IT system has allowed a higher effectiveness and efficiency in the use of the system by both the Member States and the European Commission.

Member States are also using the system more efficiently since it is now clearer where and how it is most relevant to act. Particular attention is given to providing more detailed information in the system such as details regarding economic operators, traceability, which allows the authorities to better trace the products.

What is the effect of the increased number of follow up actions ("reactions") in 2013 as compared to 2012?

Follow up actions indicate that EU Member States have taken action after a notification was distributed in the RAPEX network. These mainly imply that the product was searched and found on the national market and measures taken accordingly. The total follow up actions ("reactions" in the RAPEX system) in 2013 were 2147, which represents a substantial increase with respect to 2012 when the total reactions were 1700. This signals an increased use and effectiveness of the RAPEX system.

A RAPEX notification which receives several reactions by other Member States declaring having found the product, and taken measures, is an indicator of a working and effective RAPEX system.

Which EU countries notified most cases?

The following five Member States accounted for 48% of all RAPEX notifications on dangerous products in 2013:

- Hungary (278 notifications, 12 %)
- Germany (259 notifications, 11 %)
- Spain (254 notifications, 11 %)
- Bulgaria (191 notifications, 8 %)
- United Kingdom (142 notifications, 6%).

In 2013, approximately one third of the participating countries notified more dangerous products than in 2012. If follow up actions (reactions) are included in the overall alerts, Spain is the most active country (458 alerts) followed by Hungary (377 alerts) and Germany (361 alerts).

What are the main products and risks detected through the RAPEX system?

The product categories most often notified, which accounted for 70% of all notifications were:

1. Clothing, textiles and fashion items (583 notifications, 25%)
2. Toys (580 notifications, 25%)
3. Electrical appliances and equipment (207 notifications, 9%)
4. Motor vehicles (160 notifications, 7%)
5. Cosmetic products (106 notifications, 4%)

The five most frequently notified risk categories were:

1. Injuries (656 notifications, 23 %)
2. Chemical (580 notifications, 20 %)
3. Choking (398 notifications, 14 %)
4. Electric shock (329 notifications, 12 %)
5. Strangulation (266 notifications, 9 %)

If compared with previous years, the above have been regularly appearing in the top five products and risk categories in RAPEX notifications, although in different orders. The explanation for a similar pattern is found mostly in the high volumes of consumption/supply in the above five categories (e.g. electrical appliances include mobile phones, laptops, extension leads, battery chargers), which increase the chances of finding also dangerous products. Member States authorities also perform risk-based and targeted market surveillance actions concentrating on the most dangerous products and on the most vulnerable consumers, for example children.

What does it show when a country makes a lot of notifications – is it that there are more dangerous products on that particular market?

The number of notifications made by a particular Member State cannot be directly linked to the level of safety of the products on its market. There may be many reasons why some Member States may have more notifications than others: large market, large import volumes, experienced inspectors, etc. In general, it follows that the European countries which have the biggest markets and the greatest number of imported goods, and which also have the highest number of inspectors, find more dangerous goods and thus notify through RAPEX more often than smaller countries.

What measures did the national authorities take in response to the dangerous goods that they found?

The most frequently compulsory measures taken with regard to dangerous consumer products in 2013 were: withdrawal from the market, sales ban, recall from consumers, import rejected by the customs authorities, and corrective actions.

Where did the largest amount of dangerous products come from in 2013?

According to the RAPEX statistics, the majority of dangerous products notified through RAPEX came from outside the EU – China and Turkey amongst others.

China (including Hong Kong) was indicated as a country of origin for 64% (1459 notifications) of notified products.

Dangerous products of European origin accounted for 284 notifications (15%), including 55 products of German origin (2%), 42 products of Italian origin (2%) and 31 products of Bulgarian origin (1%).

From 2012 the number of unsafe products made in the EU has decreased and the decrease becomes even more substantial if the data are compared with the beginning of the RAPEX system: in 2004 the portion of dangerous products coming from the EU was 27%. The same applies to the number of unknown country of origin. They have decreased since 2012 and here too the comparison with the first years of RAPEX is striking: 2004 and 2005 had about 20% of products with unknown origin. The latter can be certainly taken as an indicator of the increased traceability of consumer products' supply chains.

Is there an increase in the number of notifications on products of Chinese origin?

Yes, there was a further increase in the number of consumer products of Chinese origin notified via RAPEX **in 2013 if compared to 2012 – from 58% in 2012 to 64% in 2013**. In total, 1497 notifications concerned products manufactured in China (including Hong Kong).

Although higher than in 2012, this still remains in the range of the average observed over the last few years. In addition, the higher number of products with Chinese origin could be a result of the increased traceability: what in previous years was in some cases indicated as "Unknown" may have been now notified (with further details on the supply chain) as coming from China. In addition, the high number is due to the significant market penetration of Chinese-manufactured consumer products in European markets. Products are checked according to the same, stringent safety requirements regardless of their origin, usually on the basis of typical risks associated with the product category. The steady intensification of contacts with the Chinese administration and businesses is bearing fruit in terms of improved product identification and traceability, allowing more effective corrective measures. This cooperation will continue.

Product Traceability - What does the Commission do for better product identification and consequently for better follow-up of RAPEX notifications?

In 2011, an expert group on product traceability was established. The aim of the group was to address the following questions:

- what is the state of the art in product traceability?
- what is the state of play for some key non-food consumer products?
- what potential areas are there for improvement in this area?

This expert group consisted of 15 experts from market surveillance authorities, manufacturing and retail industries, and consumer associations. In a nutshell, the final report delivered in September 2013, contains the following recommendations:

- to economic operators to implement an effective traceability system;
- to market surveillance authorities to be trained on how to best explore traceability information in barcodes and product codes;
- an improved cooperation between public and private sectors;
- to consumers to stay vigilant when buying a product to check that it contains information on the identification of the producer, etc.

Information on the work of the group is available on the EUROPA website:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/projects/ongoing-projects_en.htm

3. Cooperation with China

The EU and China are the biggest trade partners in the world; China is the EU's first supplier and its second customer after the USA. The European Commission and the Member States have established a regular cooperation with the Chinese authorities on product safety issues.

Does the Commission get feedback on how the Chinese authorities follow up on the information sent through the "RAPEX-CHINA" application?

Cooperation in the framework of the RAPEX-China system is well-established, as the competent Chinese authorities (AQSIQ) submit quarterly reports to the Commission with the conclusions of the follow up actions undertaken with regard to the data provided through the "RAPEX-CHINA" system.

The information provided in the reports allows the Commission and Member States to monitor and analyse the follow-up market surveillance activities carried out by the Chinese authorities on their territory, and as a consequence allows them to identify and address any issues in the cooperation system. So far, 26 quarterly reports have been provided to the Commission.

How many RAPEX notifications has AQSIQ investigated since the establishment of the "RAPEX-CHINA" application?

From 2006 to 2013 AQSIQ has ensured follow-up action with regard to 2.549 RAPEX notifications. Analysis of 26 quarterly follow-up reports shows that over a three-month period AQSIQ investigates about hundred RAPEX cases. In 1459 cases (57%) investigations resulted in preventive or restrictive measures being adopted either by AQSIQ or voluntarily by the Chinese manufacturer/exporter (e.g. export stop or strengthened supervision), while in 1090 cases (43%) no measures were taken mainly due to the fact that the Chinese company responsible for manufacturing and/or exporting products to the EU could not be found.

4. Market surveillance and online sales

Given the growing use of internet to purchase consumer products, the surveillance of products sold online is a priority for the European Commission and the Member States.

In this regard it is interesting to know that the Commission has promoted the work of an expert group on "Safety of product sold online" as part of an action of the Multi-annual plan on market surveillance, included in the Product Safety and Market Surveillance Package. The working group held its first meeting recently and is expected to formulate recommendations at a later stage.

In RAPEX, there are no specific statistics which can highlight data on dangerous products which are sold online. Yet, based on a qualitative analysis of the most recent RAPEX notifications, there seems to be a growing presence of online-purchased products. A recent German notification of a tattoo set is one example. In relation to a notification from the UK, while the concerned products were found in regular shops, the UK authorities nevertheless searched on main online sites for e-shopping (Amazon and E-bay) and since the product was also available there, UK authorities informed the two online distributors about the measures and the necessity to remove the dangerous products from their "shelves".

For more information:

- [IP/14/311](#)
- Product Safety:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/news/index_en.htm
- Link to the RAPEX communication materials:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/rapex/reports/index_en.htm
- Weekly RAPEX reports or specific data:
www.ec.europa.eu/rapex
- RAPEX national contact points:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/rapex/contact_points.pdf
- Product Safety and Market Surveillance Package:
http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-93_en.htm
- Product Traceability:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/projects/ongoing-projects_en.htm