

Consumer product regulator gets tough

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Inspectors from the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications will be conducting more raids around the country in the next few weeks before Christmas. This follows a swoop on and confiscation of unsafe consumer products around Gauteng last week, acting CEO Bongani Khanyile has said.

The mandate of the regulator, which until 1 September 2008 was part of the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS), is to enforce compulsory specifications to ensure the health and safety, environmental protection and fair trade of products. The SABS regulates voluntary specifications and tests products at its laboratories.

Khanyile said the regulator was busy designing a logo that would reassure consumers that the product they are buying was compliant with standards. It has also installed a toll free number, for consumers to call if they had any doubts about the safety of a product, or believed a retailer was selling unsafe goods.

Products with compulsory specifications include certain food items, specifically fish, fishery products and canned meat; various automotive items including seat belts and brake pads; and electrical items including kettles, irons, TV sets, cables and extension cords. The list will be expanded over time.

Earlier this year a supplier of extension cords was compelled to recall products that were considered unsafe. Khanyile said electrical cables were particularly dangerous because they were often hidden by furniture and, if used at the incorrect voltage, could burn through and start fires.

Anyone selling items covered by the regulator were required to hold a letter of authority.

Khanyile said the bigger retail chains tended to be more compliant with the regulator's rules than the smaller retailers, or responded more quickly when they were discovered to be selling noncompliant items, because of the potential damage to their reputation.

The regulator's inspectors visited both large and small retailers regularly and had the power to embargo sales of a product while it was being tested, or confiscate and destroy it if it was found to be dangerous.

Khanyile said the regulator was also working closely with the South African Revenue Service at SA's ports and borders to try to prevent noncompliant products from entering the country.

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