



by Serena Petaccia,
CATAS

FURNITURE ON THE MARKET: SAFETY FIRST, COMMUNICATION RIGHT AFTER

“ Products placed on the market shall be safe”.

“Producers shall provide consumers with the relevant information to enable them to assess the risks associated with the use of the product”.

These are the main general obligations established by the European Directive 2001/95 (the GPSD - General Product Safety Directive) on products safety, in order to ensure a high level of protection for the safety and health of consumers on the EU market and which also applies to furniture products.

During its circulation on the market the product faces some main stations, each of them is characterized by obligations in terms of safety and information. A common tool (as a continuous red line) is always available to implement those: the technical standard.

PLACED ON THE MARKET: SAFETY FIRST

How to respond to the main requirement - safety - prescribed by the directive?

One way is the harmonized standard, that is a technical standard devel-

oped by the European standardization bodies (CEN and CENELEC) and drafted upon a formal specific request (mandate) of the European Commission.

The compliance with this standard, gives a “presumption of conformity” with the requirements of the related directive.

At the time in the furniture sector, only few standards were born as “harmonized” within the scope of the GPSD. Basically they refer to those product categories which have shown a high level of risk of incidents, injuries or intended for the use by particularly vulnerable person such as: cribs and cradles (EN 1130), outdoor furniture (EN 581-1), mattresses for cots and cribs (EN 16890).

In the case the harmonized standard, or a specific national law is not available, the compliance with the safety obligation can be assessed on the basis of the relevant (non-mandatory) technical standards. This is what the GPSD Directive prescribes. Applying the technical standard is recognized as a recommended practice in order to evaluate the safety level achieved by the product.

IN THE HANDS OF THE USER: TRACEABILITY AND INSTRUCTIONS

Since the first contact with the user, the product shall be always accompanied by a minimum content of information related to its traceability (manufacturer and product identification data) and to a correct and aware use, including instructions, warnings or any precautions to be taken during the interaction with the product.

This information shall be expressed in a clear and understandable way to ensure the consumer awareness, present on the packaging, labels or illustrative documentation.

Again the technical standards come to help.

Many standards for furniture contain specific clauses referring to the instructions for use: a guideline on the contents to be developed to properly inform the user about an appropriate use of the product, such as assembly instructions, if applicable, intended use with examples of end-use, instruction for the care and maintenance, instruction for operating the adjusting mechanisms, if present.



**UNDER THE MARKET
SURVEILLANCE:
COMMUNICATION
ON DANGEROUS PRODUCTS.**

So far, the producers are the lead actors responsible for the products safety and for drafting the relevant information to be addressed to the consumers.

Who does supervise on the safety of products? The European Member States, by its designated national authorities, are in charge of the implementation of periodical market surveillance plans consisting of appropriate control actions such as taking samples from the points of sale and submitting them to safety checks carried out in accredited laboratories. Here again, the verification tool in the hand of the authorities to verify safety requirement is the technical standard.

For any product identified as dangerous - that mostly means it is not compliant with the applicable technical standard - and already on the market,





the Member States adopted specific measures up to its immediate withdrawal from the market and recall from the consumers.

At this stage a further fundamental communication phase is activated: the information on the dangerous product shall rapidly be extended to the whole European territory, so to promptly inform the market and the consumers and promptly prevent the use or purchase of dangerous products. The notification can run around each country through RAPEX - Rapid Exchange of Information System, the European rapid alert tool set up since 2003 and based on the GPSD Directive. Alerts on the products posing a risk are every day published on the RAPEX website, the "Safety Gate".

As a final analysis, also communication proves to be an essential tool in order to ensure a high and wide level of protection of the safety and health of consumers.

BE RELIABLE: COMMUNICATION ON THE SAFETY AND QUALITY

Leaving aside obligations, let's look at the opportunities offered by the communication on the product safety and quality. How to make distinctive a safe and quality product, in an objective and transparent way?

The answer is again in the compliance with the technical standards, verified by a competent and impartial third party, the testing laboratory or the product certification body.

In the case of the testing activities, the compliance refers to, and only to, the sample selected and sent by the manufacturer to the lab.

In the case of the product certification process, the compliance refers to the entire production, as it is the result of periodical repeated audits and samplings carried out by the inspectors within the production site.



Let us say: these are the only ways for companies and producers to be clear and reliable in their statements and claims declaring performances and quality of the products placed on the market.

The reason, and the guarantee, is in the role of the whole Quality Infrastructure, a chain of different actors which operates at national

level, involving standardization bodies, metrology institutes, accreditation bodies and accredited conformity assessment bodies and which monitors and ensures that the conformity assessments rules and tools (standards, competences, equipment, procedures, ...) are always applied in the proper manner. As a final result, the evidence on the market is summarized in a single immediate communication tool: the test report issued by the accredited laboratory or the mark granted by the accredited certification body.

CATAS the leading European laboratory and product certification body for the furniture sector. For more than 30 years CATAS has been taking part at the main international standardization working groups for the furniture sector, believing it is essential to always maintain a high focus on safety and on the information that must constantly accompany the products on the market.

Since 1993, CATAS operates also as product certification body with its own brand CATAS Quality Award (CQA) - verifying the conformity of an entire production to the standards and technical specifications internationally recognized. The CQA mark is intended for raw materials (wood base panels with a limited emission of formaldehyde, wood coating systems for exterior and interior), semi-finished products (glue lam window profiles, faced panels) and finished products (Italian Origin Furniture, VOC-Low Emission Furniture, Wood and Parquet Flooring). In order to be certified, a product must be verified and must respond positively to the continuous internal controls (tests directly carried out by the manufacturer) and the inspections and tests periodically conducted by CATAS.

Within the certification process, CATAS has been the first Italian institution to obtain the accreditation by Accredia as a product certification body, specifically for the scheme on formaldehyde emission from wood based panels. Such accreditation is one of the essential prerequisites for the certification activities of wood based panels according to EPA regulations (the US Environmental Protection Agency).

World Furniture

International Markets Review

95 September 2022 - Year 24

www.worldfurnitureonline.com

SCENARIO

POLAND, MALAYSIA

PROFILES

EUROPUR, SCM, SAIB, MARMO ARREDO, FSC, ISPA

FOCUS

EU OFFICE FURNITURE MARKET, HOME OFFICE
WORLD MATTRESS INDUSTRY, UPH FURNITURE MARKET
FUNCTIONAL FINISHES IN THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY
US KITCHEN, EU BATHROOM INDUSTRY, US LIGHTING

STORYTELLING

TIME FOR INDIA, THE WALL OF WONDERS



® INTERNATIONAL
EXHIBITION OF
COMPONENTS,
SEMIFINISHED
PRODUCTS AND
ACCESSORIES
FOR THE FURNITURE
INDUSTRY

18-21
OCTOBER
2022

PORDENONE FAIR

Exposicam srl
Via G. Carducci, 12
20123 Milano • Italy
Tel: +39 0286995712
info@exposicam.it



www.exposicam.it