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Experts in Safety

Press Release

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UK Safety Experts Call for Increased Vigilance When Buying PPE

New Arco Tests Reveal Several UK Distributors Are STILL Selling Substandard CE Marked Products

Two years on from raising concerns that some safety footwear with EC type approval and CE marking is not fit for purpose Arco, the UK's leading safety company, has found further evidence of CE marked PPE products failing to meet required standards.

New testing undertaken by Arco has highlighted that not only are several CE marked safety footwear models continuing to fail standard safety tests, but samples of leather gloves have also been found to be non-compliant, raising concerns that the issue could extend across several types of PPE. The latest findings reinforce the message that CE markings cannot currently be fully relied upon as a guarantee that PPE is fit for purpose and it is essential employers closely scrutinise their supply chains to keep workers safe.

Following Arco's tests on non-metallic safety footwear in 2015, in which several footwear samples failed safety testing despite being CE marked, further market surveillance undertaken in March 2017 found a number of safety footwear products are continuing to fail standard safety tests

according to EN ISO 20345: 2011. It has also been revealed that one of the brands of footwear recently tested has failed tests on a number of previous occasions and that the manufacturer is aware of these failures.



In addition, during the 2017 tests, a random sampling of a leather glove supplied by one distributor was found to contain illegal levels of Azo dyes, these are restricted substances of very high concern under REACH, which is both carcinogenic and mutagenic^[ii].

With a growing body of evidence to suggest substandard PPE is common in UK workplaces and beyond, Arco believes it is time for change and action. While discussions are taking place with Trading Standards and organisations such as the BSIF, Arco believes reputable suppliers and customers must lead the way by demanding proof that necessary standards are being met.

This is especially important given that some of the suppliers of substandard products came from distributors who market themselves as leaders in PPE, safety and quality, meaning in many cases employers are being falsely assured that the products they are buying are meeting necessary standards. Consequently, it can be extremely difficult for those buying PPE to identify true product compliance. To help employers feel confident that the PPE they are buying is fit for purpose, Arco urges they take the following three steps:

- Ask suppliers for a declaration of conformity showing original certification for the PPE.
- Ask suppliers to define their process for sample testing to ensure safety products continue to meet the required standards.
- Ask suppliers to define their process of quality assurance to ensure products are being manufactured as originally certified.

For further information on Arco's own product assurance and fully accredited testing laboratory, please visit: www.arco.co.uk/productassurance.

About Arco

Arco is the UK's leading safety company. It distributes quality products and training and provides expert advice, helping to shape the safety world and make work a safer place. Founded in 1884 and with a heritage spanning four generations, Arco integrates traditional family values with pioneering innovation to offer a world-class range of over 170,000 quality assured, branded and own brand products, including personal protective equipment, clothing, footwear, gloves, workplace safety and hygiene products. Headquartered in Hull, Arco reaches its customers through its extensive product catalogue, interactive website and 48 strong retail store network. The company has sales of over £281m and employs approximately 1700 people. Arco has been accredited a 'One to Watch' status in the Best Companies Times Top 100 Survey.

Arco is dedicated to its Corporate Social Responsibility policy and continually demonstrates its support of local business communities and charitable organisations, donating in excess of 1% of pre tax profits annually. In 2007, Arco became a member of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and in 2010 a member of Sedex, the Supplier Ethical Data Exchange. Going forward, Arco further demonstrates its position as the UK's leading safety company as the exclusive supplier of PPE, footwear and workwear to the BLOODHOUND project's support team involved with the design, build and race of a car to raise the world land speed record to 800 mph in 2015, and 1,000mph in 2016. For more information, visit www.arco.co.uk.

[i] In one example three non-metallic footwear styles were randomly selected from a distributor and eight of the nine non-metallic footwear samples tested failed either the impact test or compression test, while six of the nine samples failed both types of test. The failing results are some of the worst Arco has ever seen with many toe-caps losing structural integrity through cracking. With compression failures down to 2mm, an injury while wearing this footwear is likely to fracture the bones of the foot leading to possible amputation.

[ii] Azo dyes are a banned substance under REACH which are used as a colourant in textiles and leather gloves. Some Azo dyes have been found to be mutagenic - they have the capacity to change genetic material - while others have been declared as carcinogens.