



# Consumers and Standards

The value of consumer participation in British Standards

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Standards are everywhere, making consumers' lives safer, fairer and better. Whether you are using a mobile phone, shopping online, buying a car, using a washing machine or travelling abroad there are numerous standards behind the scenes setting good practice for organizations that manufacture goods and provide services. (see Fig.1)

Standards have great potential to benefit consumers by tackling important issues such as safety, vulnerability, customer service, sustainability and digital privacy and security. However, it is vital that consumers are involved in standards development to make sure they address real problems faced by real people.

BSI's Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN) represents the consumer voice in British Standards, working closely with other consumer organizations in the UK, and around the world, to create standards that enhance consumer protection and minimize harm.

## How do standards benefit consumers?

Standards benefit consumers by spelling out good practice for organizations to improve safety, (see CPIN Leaflet on 'Consumer Safety') maintain consistent levels of quality and minimize the risk of harm.

### Consumer harm may include:

- Serious injury
- Adverse effect on health or environment
- Financial loss
- Unfair treatment or disadvantage
- Experiencing barriers to access
- Stress and inconvenience

Standards can cover products, services, processes, ethics and values. (For example, see CPIN leaflets on 'Sustainability' and 'Ethics'). They are a valuable tool in the consumer protection toolkit, working alongside regulation, policy and enforcement.

### Standards benefit consumers by defining good practice in areas such as:

#### Products

- Chemical composition
- Durability
- Energy consumption
- Interoperability
- Operation of mechanical parts
- Performance
- Risk assessment

#### Services

- Billing
- Dispute resolution
- Complaints handling
- Management of personal data
- Provision of information
- Quality of customer service
- Safety
- Staff training

# Value of consumer participation in standards

Most organizations do not intend to cause harm to consumers. However, this can happen when:

- Consumer needs and behaviours are not fully understood
- New goods or services are rushed to market without adequate research and testing
- Full range of risks and consequences are not considered.

To maximize positive outcomes for consumers, it is vital that the people who buy, use and are impacted by goods and services are at the heart of standards development. The role of the consumer stakeholder group is to speak up for consumers and make sure they have an equal voice.

Consumer representatives bring unique and valuable insight to the table:

- Highlighting risks often missed by businesses
- Providing evidence of harm
- Suggesting practical solutions.

Many consumer organizations lack the resources to participate in standards directly. That's why it is important to have CPIN, which has a specific role to speak up for consumers in British standards.

A consumer can be anyone who buys, uses, or may be impacted by, organizational behaviour, products and services. Customers, patients, residents and pupils are all consumers.

## Benefits

### To consumers

- ✓ Better customer service
- ✓ Clearer information
- ✓ Greater accessibility, usability and choice
- ✓ Goods that are fit for purpose
- ✓ Reduced risk of harm
- ✓ Improved interoperability and compatibility
- ✓ Effective complaints handling processes
- ✓ Improved sustainability and greener choices

### To businesses

- ✓ Understand what customers want and need
- ✓ Meet customer needs and improve customer satisfaction
- ✓ Increase efficiency and cut costs
- ✓ Improve safety and quality
- ✓ Minimize problems and reduce complaints
- ✓ Boost reputation
- ✓ Keep existing customers and win new ones

### Government agencies

- ✓ Comprehensive stakeholder consultation to develop good practice
- ✓ Enhance consumer protection without need for legislation
- ✓ Effectively deliver objectives e.g. consumer safety
- ✓ Benchmark of good practice for enforcement



# Standards are everywhere

Fig.1

There are standards all around us that improve outcomes for consumers and minimize harm.

## Consumer Safety

- Domestic appliances**  
 Reducing risk of fire, burns and other accidents  


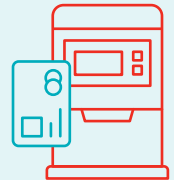
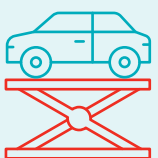


- Child car restraints**  
 Reducing risk of fatal injury in accidents  

- Plugs**  
 Reducing risk of electrocution and fire  

- Button batteries**  
 Reducing risk of choking and poisoning  

- Window blinds**  
 Reducing risk of child strangulation  


## Services


- Complaints handling**  
 Improving outcomes for customers when things go wrong  

- Financial services**  
 Helping banks to keep customer data secure and reduce fraud  

- Car repairs**  
 Ensuring high quality of maintenance and repairs  

- Children's playgrounds**  
 Allowing children to learn through play while managing risks  

- Billing**  
 Making sure utility bills are easy to understand and compare  


## Sustainability




- Social responsibility**  
 How businesses can operate sustainably reducing their impact on our planet  

- Recycling**  
 Making it easier for consumers to recycle waste  

- Circular economy**  
 Making the most efficient use of resources  

- Ethical claims**  
 Building consumer trust in ethical claims e.g. food and clothing  

- Sustainable tourism**  
 Reducing social, environmental and economic impact of tourism  


## Digital

- Online reviews**  
 Building trust in the collection, moderation and publication of reviews  

- Smart speakers**  
 Protecting consumer privacy and security  

- Internet connected toys**  
 Protecting children from hackers  

- Driverless cars**  
 Safe and ethical use of AI and automated decisions  

- E-commerce**  
 Ensuring shoppers have equal rights online and offline  


## Consumer vulnerability

- Inclusive service**  
 How to identify and support people in vulnerable situations  

- Web accessibility**  
 Making websites easier to use for everyone  

- Living with dementia**  
 How to create dementia friendly communities  

- Social alarms**  
 Allowing people to live independently at home for longer  

- Accessible buildings**  
 Making public buildings accessible for disabled people  


# Standards in brief

### What are standards?

Standards are documents that spell out good practice for a product, service or process. They can be national, European or international in scope.

### Who writes standards?

Standards are published by national standards bodies (NSBs), such as BSI in the UK. But they are written by experts, brought together by BSI, who represent stakeholder groups, such as government, industry, academics and consumers. Collaboration between different stakeholder groups leads to credible and robust standards, making sure all perspectives are included and nothing important is missed.

### How are standards developed?

Standards follow a set process, which includes drafts, public consultation and review. They are developed by reaching consensus, which means that expert groups must reach shared agreement on the content. For international standards, each participating country's view is taken into account.

### Who uses standards?

Standards are bought and used by a wide range of organizations including manufacturers, retailers, service providers, government agencies, testing laboratories and consumer groups. Published standards can support public policy, such as energy labelling. They can also be used by enforcement agencies, or referenced in court, to decide whether an organization has followed good practice.

### Do organizations have to follow standards?

Standards are voluntary. However, organizations choosing to comply are demonstrating a commitment to safety and quality. In some sectors, such as children's toys and domestic appliances, legislation references specific standards, which can provide organizations with practical information to help them achieve compliance with the law. Claims of compliance with standards can be verified by an independent third party.

# Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN)

## What is CPIN?

CPIN exists to empower and protect consumers, making everyone's lives safer, fairer and better through effective consumer representation in British Standards. Established in 1951, CPIN is recognized as an independent consumer organization and operates with financial support from BSI and government.

CPIN's trained volunteers participate in the development of standards to highlight key consumer issues, make sure that real problems are addressed and minimize the risk of consumer harm. We believe that all consumers have a right to safe and accessible goods and services, clear information, fair treatment, effective systems of redress and a healthy environment. CPIN representatives use the principles laid out in the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (UNGCP) as the foundation of their work.

## Representing consumers

CPIN representatives sit on hundreds of standards development committees to speak up for consumers. As consumer experts they are trained to identify consumer issues in any product or service, prompting standards-makers to think about:

- **All consumers** - the different needs, experiences and abilities of people of all ages, genders and ethnicities, including those in vulnerable situations
- **Real life use** - how goods and services might be used, or impact consumers, in real life. For example:
  - Malicious use - a stranger hacking into a child's internet-connected toy
- **Unintended use** – young children playing with a tumble dryer intended for adult users
- **Passive use** - pedestrians breathing in noxious fumes from vehicle exhausts
- **Potential harm** – the risks to consumers if things go wrong and the scale of harm. How many people might be affected, for example, individuals, specific groups, local, national or global populations
- **The big picture** – relevant consumer issues at all stages of a product lifecycle or service journey. For example, from design and manufacture; to sale, purchase and consumption; to complaints and redress; recycling and disposal.

*"CPIN experts unlock the full potential of British Standards, to improve outcomes for consumers in their interactions with organizations. By taking a strategic approach, which focuses on issues that pose the greatest risk of harm, CPIN can help to make life safer, fairer and better for everyone, particularly those who are vulnerable. Our close collaboration with the BSI Consumer Forum helps to strengthen the effectiveness of British Standards as a consumer protection tool."*

Julie Hunter, CPIN Chair

## CPIN collaboration

CPIN is a core member of BSI's Consumer Forum and works closely with other UK consumer organizations to inform the work of its representatives and strengthen the consumer position. CPIN holds ad-hoc meetings for consumer experts to seek input for specific standards. For example, recent workshops have covered 'Consumer Vulnerability', 'Privacy by Design' and 'Bringing Safe Products to Market'.

International cooperation is also important. 95% of standards published by BSI each year are European or international in scope, reflecting the global nature of consumer markets and supply chains. International standards help to tackle cross-border issues and deliver consistent consumer protection. CPIN representatives actively participate in their development to ensure that they meet the needs of, and provide benefits for, UK consumers. CPIN also collaborates with ANEC, Consumers International, and ISO COPOLCO to share insight, develop policy and identify common goals.

## CPIN priorities

BSI publishes around 2,500 standards each year and it would be impossible for CPIN to get involved in every single one. So, resources are focused in areas where CPIN can have the greatest positive impact for consumers, based on the following priorities:

- **Consumer safety** – protect consumers' health and safety when using goods and services, by helping organizations to minimize risks. Find out more in CPIN's 'Consumer Safety' leaflet
- **Consumer vulnerability** – goods and services are fair and inclusive, and that organizations provide the right support for those in vulnerable situations. Find out more in CPIN's 'Consumer Vulnerability' leaflet
- **Digital** – organizations' keep personal data safe and secure and consumers are able to make informed choices about digital products and services. Find out more in CPIN's 'Digital' leaflet.
- **Services** – consumers can access safe, fair, quality services both online and offline. Find out more in CPIN's 'Services' leaflet
- **Sustainability** – organizations follow sustainable business practice and help consumers to make green choices. Find out more in CPIN's 'Sustainability' leaflet.

CPIN exists to empower and protect consumers through effective consumer representation in British Standards.

# BSI Consumer Forum

Consumer Forum Council members include:

Fig.2

The BSI Consumer Forum brings together organizations from across the consumer protection landscape, including CPIN, to share valuable insight about topical consumer issues. Members include charities, regulators, enforcement agencies and government departments who may have expertise in a specific topic (e.g. electrical safety or sustainability), the needs of particular groups of consumers (e.g. children or older people), or general consumer issues. There is an annual Consumer Forum conference for members and other interested parties.

Senior representatives from these organizations (see Fig.2) form the BSI Consumer Forum Council, which takes a strategic overview of consumer issues and explores potential standards solutions. It guides CPIN's priorities and provides the consumer perspective to BSI's Standards, Policy, and Strategy Committee (SPSC) which drives standards development and delivery.

This collaboration strengthens the UK consumer stakeholder voice in standards and helps organizations to achieve a shared ambition to enhance consumer protection.

*"The Consumer Forum Council harnesses significant consumer expertise to think strategically about how to enhance consumer protection, through standards. The group concentrates on where new or revised standards will be of greatest benefit to consumers at any given time. The value of that commitment, to improving standards and raising awareness of their benefits, is immeasurable."*

**Liz Barclay**, Consumer Forum Chair



## Case study: Product recalls

CPIN and the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) at BEIS collaborated to improve the product recall system for consumers. An OPSS spokesperson says: "Standards are part of the toolkit for tackling consumer problems, working alongside education and legislation. We had evidence that the product recall system was not well understood and therefore was not protecting consumers from unsafe products. We worked with BSI, through the Consumer Forum Council, to develop a PAS on Product Recalls to outline good practice for businesses and regulators. This proved to be a quick and effective way to raise awareness and improve processes."



## Case study: Domestic appliance fires

Which? research and data provides valuable evidence to support CPIN representatives in their work. In 2018 CPIN collaborated with Which?, Electrical Safety First and the London Fire Brigade to improve safety standards for domestic appliances to reduce the risk of fire.

A spokesperson from Which? says: "Standards play an important role in consumer protection by providing a framework that helps businesses comply with legislation. British standards are also used in a lot of the comparative product testing that Which? undertakes."



## Case study: Button batteries

CPIN works closely with RoSPA and the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) to make sure that standards minimize potential risks to children.

CAPT's CEO says: "We have been collaborating with CPIN to contribute to a new standard for button batteries to make it harder for children to access potentially lethal batteries in everyday household products such as remote controls, gaming headsets and tea lights. Standards are vital in helping to protect children and reassuring parents that what they're buying is safe. We're very pleased to work with CPIN to help improve product safety."

# How to get involved

## Organizations

If you work in consumer protection and would like to contribute to the UK consumer voice in standards, there are a variety of ways to get involved:

- Join the BSI Consumer Forum to network with other organizations about topical consumer issues and find out about CPIN's work in key consumer standards.
- Participate directly in the development of standards that are important to your organization, by joining the relevant committee as a consumer stakeholder expert
- Contribute indirectly to standards by liaising with CPIN reps, or attending CPIN stakeholder workshops on specific topics, to share your expertise, raise key issues and provide evidence of consumer harm. This helps to guide CPIN's work in standards meetings.

To find out more, please contact [consumer@bsigroup.com](mailto:consumer@bsigroup.com) for details.

## Individuals

If you would like to become a CPIN representative, to make a positive difference to consumers through standards, please get in touch.

We welcome applications from consumer champions with a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience. Full training and support will be given.

Contact [consumer@bsigroup.com](mailto:consumer@bsigroup.com) for more information.

# Further information

## BSI

BSI is the UK's National Standards Body. Our role is to help improve the quality and safety of products, services and systems by enabling the creation of standards and encouraging their use.

Find out more about BSI at [bsigroup.com](https://www.bsigroup.com)

To browse our standards catalogue, visit [shop.bsigroup.com](https://shop.bsigroup.com)

You can also review standards in development and submit comments at [drafts.bsigroup.com](https://drafts.bsigroup.com)

## Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN)

The independent consumer voice in British standards.

To find out more about CPIN visit [bsigroup.com/consumers](https://www.bsigroup.com/consumers) or email the Consumer Team [consumer@bsigroup.com](mailto:consumer@bsigroup.com)

## European and international partnerships

### ANEC

The European consumer voice in standards [anec.eu](https://www.anec.eu)

### Consumers International

Membership organization bringing together 200+ consumer groups worldwide [consumersinternational.org](https://www.consumersinternational.org)

### ISO COPOLCO

The Consumer Policy Committee of the International Organization for Standardization [iso.org/copolco](https://www.iso.org/copolco)

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