businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Flammability of clothing, costumes and dress-up wear

In the guide

What is flammability
How to assess fire risks
Standards and testing
Fancy dress and costumes
Warnings and instructions
Responsibilities of businesses
Trading Standards
In this update
Key legislation

In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

Clothing supplied to consumers must be safe.

The General Product Safety Regulations 2005 require that producers and distributors only place safe products on the market. In assessing whether clothing is safe, consideration should be given to different factors, including the product's characteristics, instructions, warnings, categories of consumers at risk and any applicable Standards.

Businesses that manufacture, import or supply clothing should take reasonable steps to identify and minimise flammability risks before placing products on the market.

What is flammability

Flammability relates to how easily a material ignites and how quickly a flame spreads across the surface.

Most textile materials will burn if exposed to a sufficient ignition source. However, some fabrics ignite more easily than others, burn more rapidly, or continue burning for longer.

The risk presented by a garment will depend on a number of factors, including:

- The type of fibre
- Fabric construction and weight
- Surface finishes and treatments
- Design and fit
- Presence of decorative features, such as ribbons or tassels
- Age and vulnerability of the intended wearer

How to assess fire risks

When placing clothing on the market, businesses should consider foreseeable risks associated with normal use.

Factors that might increase the risk include:

- Loose-fitting garments, or long / flowing sleeves that can easily come into contact with naked flames
- Highly flammable fabrics
- Fancy dress costumes
- Clothing for children
- Garments intended to be worn near heat sources - for example, when cooking

Care should be taken where products are intended for children, as they may be less able to recognise and avoid hazards.

Standards and testing

While there is no general requirement for all clothing to undergo flammability testing, it can be an important part of demonstrating that a product is safe. There are specific requirements for nightwear (see 'New nightwear' for more information).

Businesses can choose to use recognised Standards when assessing flammability performance such as BS EN 71-2:2020+A1:2025 *Safety of toys - Flammability*, which is discussed in the section below. Compliance with relevant Standards can help demonstrate that suitable steps have been taken to evaluate the safety. The level of assessment will depend on the nature of the garment and the risk it presents.

Businesses should keep records of any testing, risk assessments and technical information used to support safety decisions.

Fancy dress and costumes

Fancy dress costumes can present particular flammability risks as they are often worn by children and made from lightweight synthetic materials.

The toy safety Standard BS EN 71-2 contains specific flammability requirements and test methods for children's toy disguise costumes and dress-up outfits. These products are generally considered to be toys and should comply with the requirements of the Toys (Safety) Regulations 2011. Manufacturers can use BS EN 71-2 to demonstrate compliance with the flammability requirements of those Regulations.

BS EN 71-2 is concerned with limiting fire hazards associated with toys; it includes requirements to ensure that products are not readily flammable and do not present an unacceptable risk if exposed to a small ignition source.

Not all fancy dress costumes will necessarily be regarded as toys for the purposes of the Toys (Safety) Regulations 2011. However, even where those Regulations do not apply, BS EN 71-2 may provide a useful benchmark for assessing flammability risks associated with costumes, and particularly those intended for children.

Businesses might want to consider *The Flammability of Children's Disguise Costume - Code of Practice* from the British Retail Consortium. This is a voluntary industry code, which sets out good practice measures and includes flammability performance criteria that go beyond the legal minimum requirements.

Warnings and instructions

Warnings cannot be used as a substitute for designing a safe product. Rather, suitable warnings should be used where residual risks remain, and the warnings would assist consumers to use the product safely.

Suitable warnings should be:

- Clear and easy to understand
- Legible
- In English
- Proportionate to the residual risk identified

An example of a suitable warning might be advising consumers to keep garments away from naked flames or other sources of heat.

Responsibilities of businesses

Manufacturers are responsible for ensuring that clothing is safe before it is placed on the market. This includes carrying out risk assessments, testing or gathering supporting information where necessary, and taking corrective actions if safety issues are identified.

Importers should take reasonable steps to make sure that products imported into the UK are compliant with the applicable safety requirements and do not present risks to consumers.

Distributors and retailers must act with due care; they should not supply goods that they know or ought to know are unsafe.

All businesses should co-operate with enforcement authorities to take appropriate corrective action should safety concerns arise.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards Services and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law, please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

New guidance: October 2026

Key legislation

- Nightwear (Safety) Regulations 1985
- General Product Safety Regulations 2005
- Toys (Safety) Regulations 2011

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

© 2026 Chartered Trading Standards Institute

Source URL:
https://businesscompanion.owastaging.co.uk/en/quick-guides/product-safety/flammability-of-clothing-costumes-and-dress-up-wear