

■ **Summary** An extensive analysis of records of recalls in the UK of unsafe consumer products (excluding food, medicines and vehicles) reveals that for several years the actual frequency of such announcements has been considerably greater than indicated by any single published monitor. However from cross-checking multiple sources it is clear that the total number exceeded 200 in 2012. From the analysis it is probable that this figure was also exceeded in 2007 - which now clearly emerges as a record year for recalls in the UK (as it was already known to have been in many other countries) - although there may never be agreement on the total number of recalls in that year. The figures presented here for 2009, 2010 and 2011 were about 160 per year. The rate for 2012 represents a 20% increase. However consumer product recalls now are routinely three or four times the average numbers for the 1990s and through to 2003. The powers granted to Trading Standards Authorities in 2005 to order recalls are likely to have been responsible - in part - for this increase, although the pattern also partly reflects trends in recalls in the USA. However the current year's figures show a continuing rise in recalls of products on the UK market.

The major discrepancies revealed between the figures and trends for product recalls in the UK according to different monitoring sources –which this article investigates - offer a poor basis for making policy decisions about product safety measures or judging their effectiveness. The confusion arises because - unlike in the US - there is no single official database of product safety recalls and withdrawals for the UK – and no searchable public archive.

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