

Skin lighteners & soaps cosmetic safety regulations

Trading Standards Information

www.southwark.gov.uk

1. Introduction

Cosmetic products are subject to strict EU safety regulations. The Cosmetic Products Enforcement Regulations 2013 implement these in the UK. It is a criminal offence to supply products which do not comply with the regulations.

This leaflet contains brief guidance on the products that have often caused problems in the past. For more detailed information about the regulations please refer to our information leaflet entitled 'Cosmetic products safety regulations.'

Failure to comply could result in goods being seized and prosecution. On conviction a Crown Court may impose a fine of up to £20,000 or up to 12 months imprisonment or both. Any assets obtained from the benefit of criminal activity can be confiscated under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2006.

2. Skin lighteners

Complexion, beauty and skin creams, sometimes called skin toners often contain **hydroquinone**. This has been banned for use in such products for over 10 years. Hydroquinone is a bleaching agent which bleaches, or lightens, the skin. However, this action is reversed by exposure of the skin to strong sunlight. Excessive use of products containing hydroquinone can lead to permanent damage of the skin pigment. This can result in a patchy uneven lightening of the skin, or the appearance of dark patches.

We sometimes find products that were intended to be sold outside the EU being sold illegally in the borough. In addition where people have personally imported cosmetics from some African countries these have often proved to be counterfeit and/or to contain excessive amounts of banned or restricted ingredients.

Some skin lighteners have also been found to contain **Ammoniated Mercury**. Mercury and its compounds are also banned.

Check the labelling to make sure that hydroquinone or mercury is not in the product.

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3. Steroid based products used as cosmetic skin lighteners

We have prosecuted many retailers who have been found selling steroid based products as skin lighteners, for example Movate Cream, Dermovate and others. These particular products contain ingredients so potent they should not be available in retail outlets as they would be classed as **prescription only medicines**. Such ingredients include Clobetasol Propionate and Fluocinonide

Some, but not all, are marked on the container, or packaging, with the symbol 'POM' to denote 'prescription only medicine'. These should only be available from a chemist on prescription. Sales from cosmetic shops are illegal. Avoid products stating 'pharmaceutical product' or 'to be used under medical supervision' etc.

Check for substances like Clobetasol Propionate, Bethamethasone Dipropionate or Fluocinonide.

4. Germicidal / Antiseptic soaps

Certain brand name soaps have previously been found to contain mercury which is prohibited.

Mercury and its compounds are extremely toxic and can be absorbed through the skin with serious side effects including skin and kidney damage depression and vomiting.

Check to make sure that mercury or a mercuric compound, such as mercuric iodide, is not listed.

5. Is there a list of products I should not sell?

We have published a list of some products that we have previously found to be illegal. It is available from our website. Note that some of the products on it may have been reformulated so always check before making a decision. The European RAPEX site can be searched for alerts too.

6. What other steps can I take to make sure the products I sell comply?

Previously problems have arisen where retailers purchase stock from travelling salespersons or direct from outside the EU. We recommend you only deal with reputable and established EU based suppliers.

Retailers and wholesalers must carry out physical checks on the stock to check it is correctly labelled with the name and address of a responsible person, a batch number and an ingredients list. They must also ensure products are not passed any marked expiry dates. Some products actually say 'Not to be supplied in the EU' on them. When conducting these checks look out for the prohibited substances mentioned. Do not buy stock in that does not bear the correct labeling.

Importers and manufacturers must do a lot more – see our separate guidance on this.

In all cases you should keep detailed records of where cosmetic products were purchased from and keep them available for inspection 3 years from when you obtained them.

7. Further information

If you require further assistance on the regulations, or would like additional information leaflets, please contact us at the address given. We have published more detailed information on our website, including a list of banned products that we have found. Visit our business advice pages on skin lighteners at;

www.southwark.gov.uk/tradingstandards