

COMBATTING SUB-STANDARD PPE IN THE UK

82%

OF PPE FROM NON-REGISTERED SUPPLIERS
FAILED SAFETY TESTS

(Includes performance, documentation, and product marking non-compliances)

WHY
VERIFICATION
AND TRUSTED
SUPPLIERS ARE
KEY TO SAFETY



A BSIF GUIDE

Foreword



John Hooker
Chief Executive Officer
British Safety Industry Federation

Sub-standard PPE is dangerous. Users put themselves into hazardous situations thinking they are protected when they are not. The **British Safety Industry Federation** (BSIF) exists to support a safety equipment market in which products placed on the UK market are compliant, capable of protecting those who rely on them and not dangerous.

While statutory enforcement of product safety regulations sits with Trading Standards and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the scale and complexity of the PPE market is a challenge for them to police. In this context, the BSIF's voluntary market surveillance and compliance work plays an increasingly important role in identifying dangerous, non-compliant products and supporting the HSE and Trading Standards' policing activities.

Each year, the BSIF tests PPE sourced from both Registered Safety Supplier members and non-registered suppliers. The findings from this testing continue to reveal a concerning and persistent pattern with non-registered suppliers: a significant proportion of the PPE sold by many in the UK does not meet regulatory requirements or perform as claimed. This paper details some of these shocking examples and statistics. Behind each one lies the potential for real harm; a helmet that fails to absorb impact, respiratory protection that does not adequately filter hazardous substances, or fall protection equipment that fails under load. These risks are not theoretical – they are preventable.

Through the Registered Safety Supplier Scheme, the BSIF provides a clear and accessible route for buyers to identify suppliers that have committed to compliance, transparency, and independent verification. I urge all buyers and specifiers of PPE to make safer purchasing decisions by taking the time to verify the products they purchase and to look for the BSIF Registered Safety Supplier shield. Doing so is a simple but vital step in protecting workers and meeting legal responsibilities.

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Executive Summary

Testing conducted by the BSIF between January 2025 and January 2026 identified widespread non-compliance among personal protective equipment (PPE) supplied by non-registered organisations.

Only 18% of products tested from these organisations met all applicable regulatory requirements. 82% failed one or more checks relating to technical performance, certification, documentation, or product marking. In several high-risk categories, including hearing protection and working at height equipment, overall failure rates reached 100%.

The 82% overall failure rate reflects all forms of non-compliance, including failures relating to documentation and product marking. While 43% of products failed technical performance testing alone, it is important to note that any failure in documentation or marking renders a product non-compliant with UK PPE regulations, irrespective of laboratory performance outcomes.

By contrast, PPE sourced from BSIF Registered Safety Suppliers demonstrated a consistently high level of compliance, with 96% of products meeting all required standards. Where non-conformities were identified, these were addressed promptly with BSIF support.

These findings highlight a clear compliance gap in the PPE market and reinforce a simple but critical message: PPE that has not been independently verified may be unsafe and non-compliant. Buyers and duty holders must take proactive steps to verify supplier credibility and product compliance in order to protect workers and meet their legal obligations.

BSIF Market surveillance overview

The BSIF plays a crucial role in safeguarding the UK safety equipment market through extensive and ongoing market surveillance. Its objective is to ensure that personal protective equipment (PPE) and related safety products available to UK users are compliant, genuine, and capable of performing to the standards they claim. This commitment is central to the BSIF's mission of eliminating non-compliant, unsafe, or counterfeit products from the marketplace, as outlined in the Registered Safety Supplier Scheme (RSSS) handbook.

The BSIF's surveillance activities focus on two key areas: the monitoring of its own Registered Safety Supplier members, and the wider surveillance of products offered by non-member suppliers. Together, these efforts give a comprehensive picture of market integrity and highlight areas where corrective action or regulatory intervention may be needed.

For BSIF-registered suppliers, surveillance is ongoing as part of the annual BSIF assessment process. This begins with a formal declaration in which members reconfirm their commitment to supplying only products that meet the relevant regulations, including the requirements of PPE Regulation (EU) 2016/425 as retained in UK law. This declaration requires members to ensure performance claims are genuine and supported by appropriate technical documentation.

The assessment continues with a review of company documentation and independent product testing. The documentation review is conducted with a focus on compliance and the key processes for ensuring the safety and health of end-users. This includes the quality management system, continuous improvement and processes for product traceability and the management of a product recall. Training records are also reviewed to ensure commitment is maintained to the NEBOSH endorsed BSIF Safe Supply Course and Qualification. In BSIF's experience, safety outcomes for end users are better when they receive support and product recommendations from trained staff.

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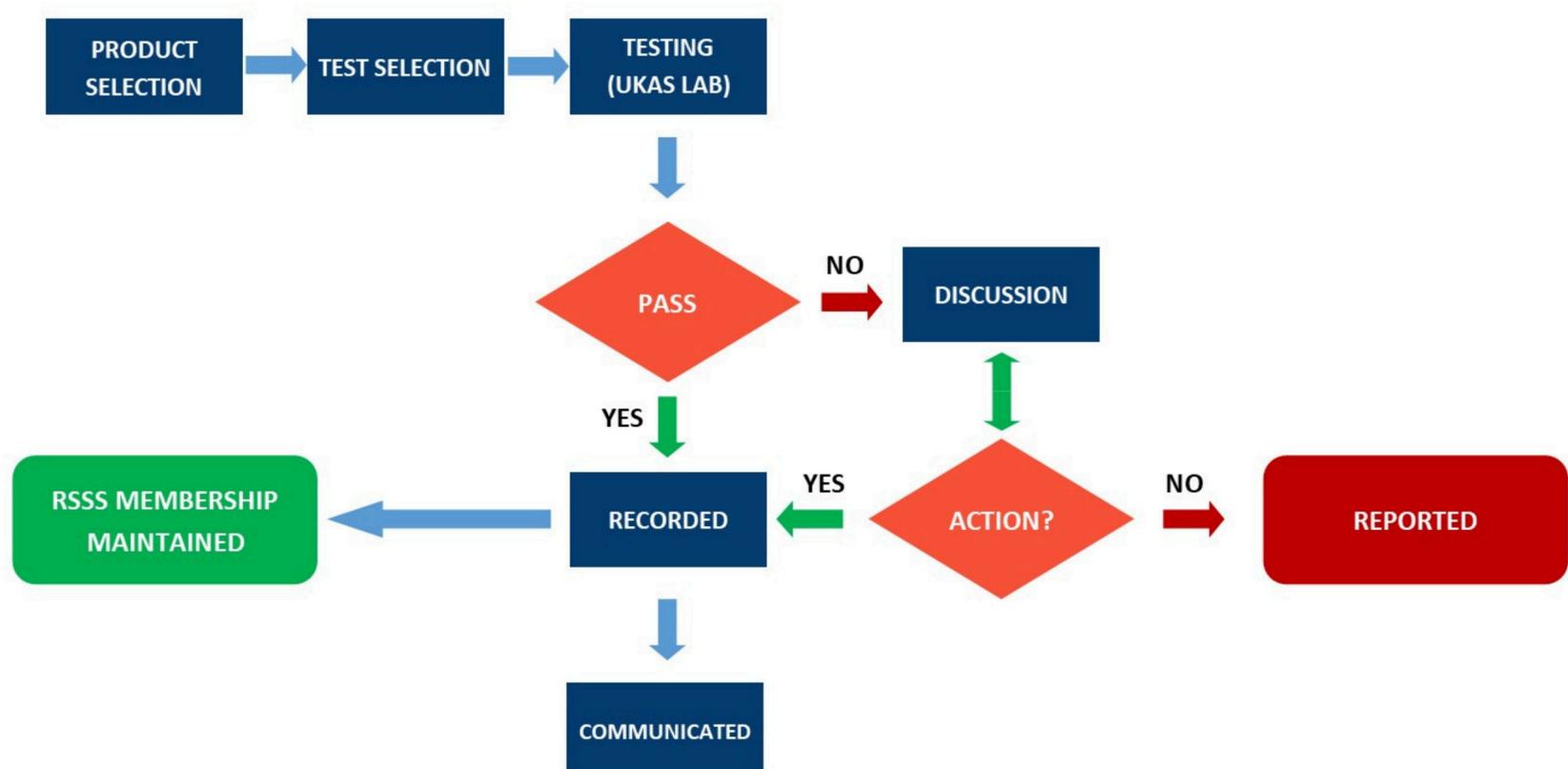


Product submitted for independent product testing by an accredited test house will have been selected and subjected to a documentation review by a BSIF assessor. The required documents include the declaration of conformity, technical file and CE/UKCA certificate and they are checked to ensure the product meets all claimed standards and regulatory obligations. Overall, this gives a robust picture of the product's legitimacy and performance.

Alongside these member-specific assessments, the BSIF also monitors the wider market by purchasing and testing products from non-member suppliers. This broader surveillance provides insight into trends in non-compliance and highlights unsafe goods circulating outside the scheme. These findings help strengthen industry awareness and provide supporting evidence for the policing activities of Trading Standards and the HSE when needed.

Through this combination of structured assessments, open-market sampling, and independent testing, the BSIF provides an essential oversight mechanism for the UK's PPE and safety equipment sector. Its market surveillance work promotes confidence, transparency, and safety, ensuring that both workers and organisations can rely on the products designed to protect them.

BSIF member assessment process



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Failure rates by PPE category (non-registered suppliers)

Over the twelve months from January 2025 to January 2026, BSIF testing teams assessed 88 PPE products sourced from suppliers outside the Registered Safety Supplier Scheme. In total, 116 tests were conducted, as some products were subject to multiple performance assessments. Each product also underwent a review of certification, documentation and product marking, in line with the requirements of the PPE Regulation (EU) 2016/425 as retained in UK law.

Overall non-compliance rate: 82%

What counts as a failure?

A product is recorded as non-compliant if it fails any of the following checks:

- Technical performance testing
- Product marking requirements (including CE/UKCA marking, instructions, and traceability)
- Certification or supporting technical documentation

While testing on 43% of products resulted in technical performance failure, the overall non-compliance rate rises to 82% when documentation and product marking non-compliances are included. This is significant because it is absolutely essential to have proof that PPE, selected following a risk assessment, is capable of performing to protect against the specific hazards identified.

Without proper certification records, required documentation, and conformity markings, there is no reliable evidence that the product has been tested against the correct standards or hazard categories. As a result, users and purchasers cannot be confident they are selecting the right protective equipment for the risks present.

In addition, the lack of clear user instructions increases the likelihood of incorrect use, fitting, maintenance, or storage. Even a product that performs well under laboratory conditions can fail to provide adequate protection if it is worn or applied incorrectly. Insufficient guidance may lead users to misuse the product, overlook limitations, or misunderstand safe operating procedures which can increase exposure to hazards and elevate the risk of injury or harm.

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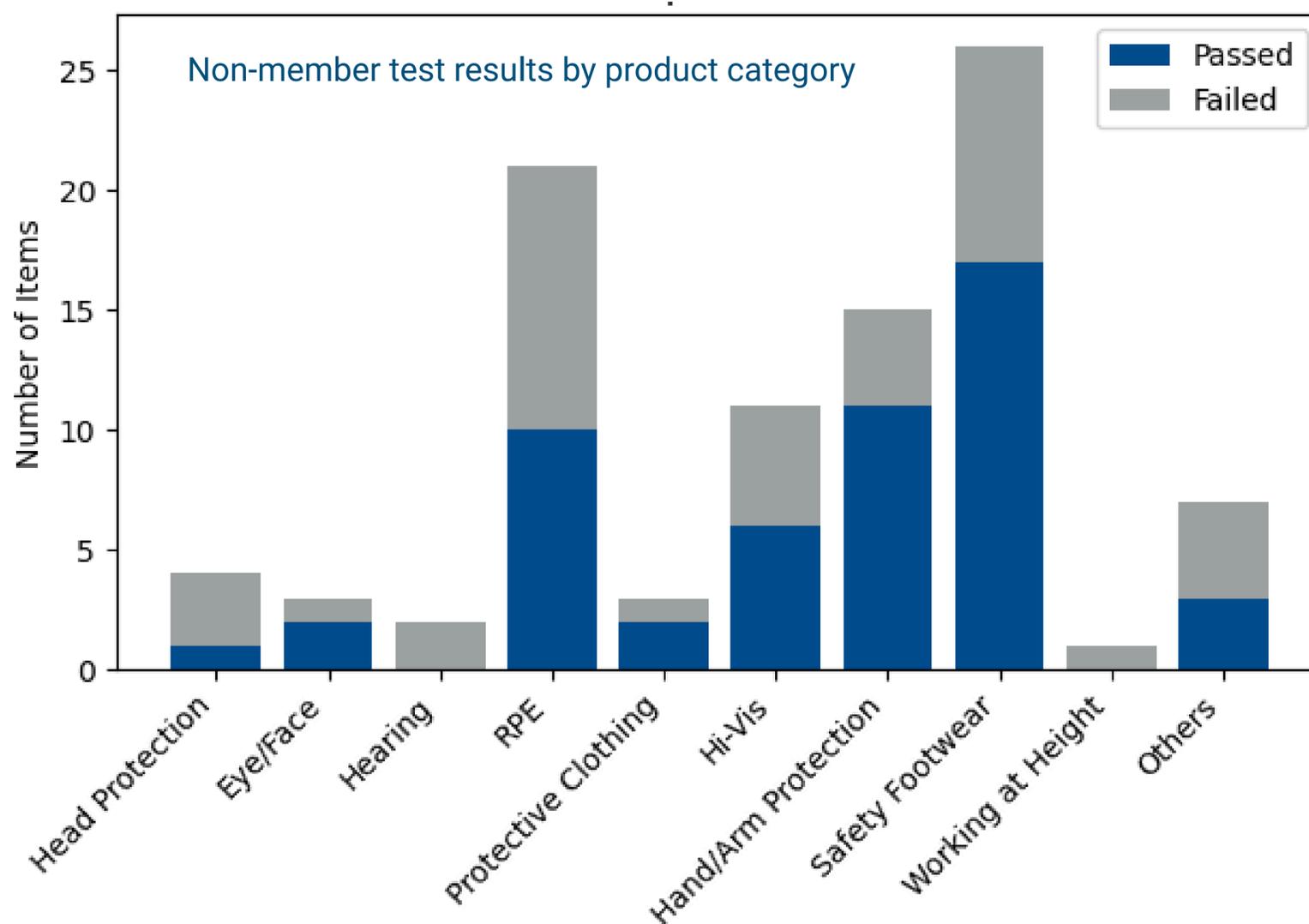


For these reasons, documentation and marking compliance are not merely administrative requirements; they are essential components of product safety and effective risk protection.

By contrast with the 82% failure rate for products sourced from non-registered suppliers, PPE sourced from BSIF Registered Safety Suppliers demonstrated a consistently high level of compliance, with 96% meeting all applicable regulatory requirements.

Non-member PPE testing summary

- 88 products assessed
- 116 performance tests conducted
- 61 performance tests passed
- 55 performance tests on 38 products failed (43% product technical failure rate)
- 232 documentation and product marking non-compliances
- Total 287 non-compliances
- 82% total failure rate for all tests and all document/marking assessments



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How did products fail in 2025?

Testing and compliance reviews across a wide range of personal protective equipment (PPE) sourced from both online retailers and high street stores revealed repeated and serious categories of failure.

Failures were not limited to poor technical performance, but also included missing certification, incorrect markings, inadequate instructions, and misleading standards claims. Many products showed multiple failures at the same time, increasing overall risk to users.

Certification and documentation failures

Missing documentation – especially Declarations of Conformity – was widespread. Many products had no verifiable proof of testing or regulatory assessment. Without this documentation, there is no reliable confirmation that products are suitable for their intended hazards. In several product groups, every sampled item had at least one required document missing or insufficient.

Marking and labelling failures

Many products lacked required conformity markings or displayed them incorrectly. Issues included missing CE/UKCA marks, incomplete labels, removable stickers used as markings, and missing traceability details. Some products also referenced outdated standards. These failures prevent proper compliance checks and can mislead users about protection levels.

User instruction deficiencies

User instructions were frequently missing or incomplete. Many products were supplied without adequate guidance on correct use, fitting, maintenance, limitations, and warnings. Even compliant equipment can fail to protect if used incorrectly, making instruction gaps a direct safety concern.



We saw eye protection immediately shatter on impact and flame-retardant garments burn so aggressively the tests had to be abandoned.

Roy Wilders, RSS Scheme Manager



Technical performance failures

A significant proportion of products failed performance tests, meaning they did not deliver the protection level claimed. Respiratory protective equipment frequently failed filtration tests, including products exceeding permitted penetration limits by large margins. Head protection showed critical weaknesses, with some helmets transmitting excessive impact force and others failing chin strap anchorage tests. Hearing protectors cracked under drop testing and became ineffective.

Hand and arm protection often failed abrasion and cut resistance tests, sometimes performing below their labelled rating. Safety footwear failed toecap compression, impact, and midsole penetration tests. Eye protection lenses shattered on impact instead of resisting it. Some flame-retardant garments burned aggressively during testing, and certain chemical protective garments were sold without verified chemical resistance data. These failures represent immediate real-world safety risks.

Durability and market issues

Some products failed basic durability tests, such as drop or load tests, indicating they could lose protection through normal handling without obvious signs of damage. Non-compliant products were widely found across both online marketplaces and high street retailers, sometimes under multiple brand names. While some vendors removed unsafe listings after intervention, others required referral to enforcement authorities.

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Figure 1



Figure 2

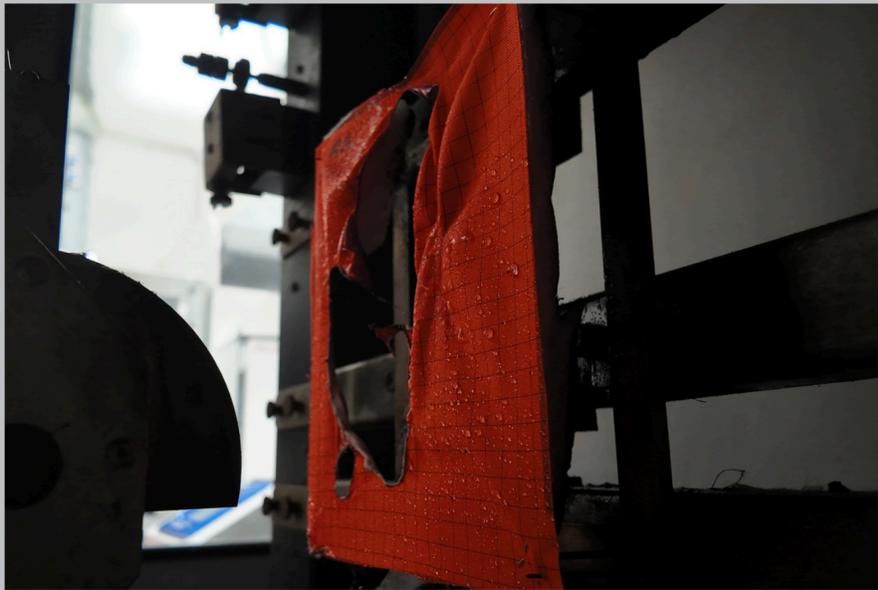


Figure 3

Flame-retardant failure

The garment shown above (Figure 1) was offered for sale on online marketplaces and was marketed as flame-retardant. To verify this claim, a section of fabric was removed from the jacket and subjected to flame exposure in a laboratory setting (Figure 2) in accordance with the requirements of the relevant EN Standard, EN ISO 11612. Under this standard, the material must meet specific performance criteria: following removal of the flame, any afterflame or afterglow must not persist for more than two seconds; the fabric must not exhibit holing or produce molten debris; and any flame propagation must not reach the upper edge of the sample.

In this case, the sample caught alight and burned so aggressively that the test had to be abandoned and action taken to extinguish the flame. As is evident in the pictures (Figures 1 & 2), the fabric failed to resist the flame, holing of considerable size was evident and the flame extended beyond the top edge of the fabric.

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82% of BSIF non-member PPE fails tests

Overall failure includes performance, documentation, and marking non-compliances



Data source: BSIF market surveillance testing, January 2025 – January 2026.

*images shown for illustration purposes only and not actual product

100%

of hearing protection didn't meet standards



94%

of head protection didn't meet test criteria



84%

of Protective Clothing FAILED tests



100%

of fall protection fell short of test criteria



86%

eye & face protection didn't pass tests



84%

of high-vis jackets FAILED brightness tests



84%

of RPE had ineffective filters



91%

Sports & Motorcycle equipment didn't pass tests



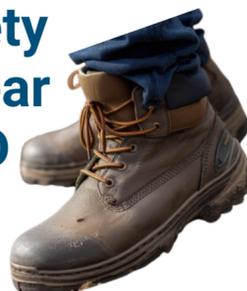
83%

of hand protection left workers exposed



79%

of safety footwear FAILED tests



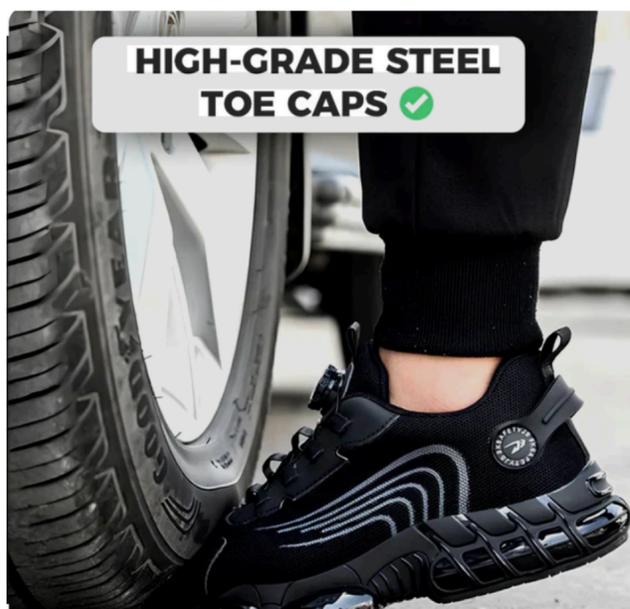
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Product spotlight: Safety footwear

In recent years there has been a trend of “safety footwear” aggressively marketed on social media platforms such as TikTok. These products are often advertised as “anti-smash,” “anti-puncture,” or “indestructible work shoes,” using video stunts including bending, crushing, or driving over them to imply extraordinary strength.

However, many of these products never underwent legitimate conformity testing and often carry false or absent certification claims.



ADVERT



LAB TEST REALITY

Of the safety footwear products purchased from non-registered suppliers and tested by BSIF in 2025:

- 79% failed overall, which includes performance criteria and/or failing to display or displaying misleading or counterfeit certification marks (CE/UKCA) with no supporting technical files.
- 35% failed to meet one or more technical criteria (toecap compression, impact resistance, penetration resistance, slip, or electrical hazard)

Follow the BSIF on social media to see the full results of our safety footwear tests, along with video footage showing the tests in action.

- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/british-safety-industry-federation
- X (Twitter) [@BSIF1](https://twitter.com/BSIF1)
- YouTube: www.youtube.com/@britishsafetyindustryfeder2761

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Case study: TikTok-promoted safety shoe recall

In 2025, the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) issued a product recall for safety shoes sold via TikTok Shop, advertised as “Men’s Anti-smash and Anti-puncture Shoes, Breathable Non-slip Work Shoes.” These products lacked valid CE or UKCA markings and had no evidence of conformity assessment.

The OPSS classified the shoes as posing a serious risk of injury, confirming they had never been certified as PPE.

 Office for Product Safety & Standards		Product Recall
Brown Safety Trainers sold via TikTok		
Aspect	Details	
Images		
PSD Number	2505-0077	
Product Type	Personal protective equipment (PPE) – Safety trainers	
Product Identifiers	Brand: Gaomi anballi Shoes Co. Ltd Model: FZ-99 TikTok listing name: “Men’s Anti-smash and Anti-puncture shoes, Breathable Non-slip work shoes, Comfortable Safety Shoes for Men, Fashionable Shoes for Daily Wear, Boy”	
Product Description	Brown and orange trainers with brown laces.	
Country of Origin	China	
Counterfeit	Unknown	
Risk Level	Serious	
Risk Type	Injuries	
Risk Description	<p>The product presents a serious risk of injuries because although advertised as 'anti-smash' and 'anti-puncture,' there is no evidence it has undergone conformity assessment as PPE and it is not CE or UKCA marked.</p> <p>The product does not meet the requirements of the Regulation (EU) 2016/425 on Personal Protective Equipment or the Personal Protective Equipment (Enforcement) Regulations 2018.</p>	
Corrective Measures	The product has been recalled from end users.	
Online Marketplace	TikTok - The listing has been removed by the online marketplace.	
Notifier	Local Authority Trading Standards.	

Strengthen your PPE procurement processes

Join the growing number of organisations choosing BSIF Registered Suppliers to ensure PPE is fit for purpose and sourced from responsible, compliant supply chains.

- ✓ Strengthen procurement and pre-qualification processes
- ✓ Reduce risk from substandard or non-compliant PPE
- ✓ Access expert guidance and support

Get involved today

To specify the Registered Safety Supplier Scheme for your supply chain, contact BSIF Membership Manager Paul.Manning@bsif.co.uk

Are you a PPE specifier or user?

Join the BSIF's new Duty Holders Membership Scheme for access to expert advice, including a dedicated PPE helpline, visit:

bsif.co.uk/duty-holder-membership

or contact BSIF Membership Manager Paul.Manning@bsif.co.uk

Further reading:

“Is it genuine?” checklist:

bsif.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Is-It-Genuine-2025-1.pdf

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Anyone can sell safety
but you shouldn't buy safety from
just anyone:

Always check for the BSIF shield!

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