

BIS FUNDED PRODUCT SAFETY AND MARKET SURVEILLANCE PROJECT REPORT 2015-16: Childcare Articles (Baby Slings and Nappy Bags)

Background

Trading Standards services within the TSSE region have a successful history of addressing safety concerns with a variety of baby and children's products. In recent years investigations have been carried out into a fabric car seat which offered little protection in the event of a car crash and a near fatality when a baby got their head stuck in their cot.

Sadly over the last few years there has been an emergence of child fatalities from nappy bags and baby slings.

Baby slings have risen in popularity as many celebrities are wearing them and the benefits of close contact between mother and baby, particularly in the months after birth, are increasingly known. They are also convenient as it allows the wearer to have both hands free.

The concern with the slings, particularly the fabric ones where the baby sits entirely inside the sling (no arm or leg holes) is that the fabric can press against the baby's nose and mouth, blocking their airways and causing suffocation within a matter of minutes. Also very young babies cannot support their head and have limited neck control so heads are more likely to flop forward with chin to chest which will restrict their ability to breathe. This is quite often the case where the baby is cradled in the curve of the sling.

Nappy bags are often stored near to a baby's cot so they are close at hand when the nappy needs to be changed. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) state that there have been at least 16 deaths in England and Wales due to suffocation and choking caused by nappy bags. The light plastic material is easy for a baby to grasp and bring to their mouth for further exploration. This can lead to the nose and mouth being obstructed or the bag inhaled. Young babies do not have the dexterity to pull the bag away from their face when they start to suffocate. Although the suffocation danger posed by regular plastic bags is widely known, widespread usage of nappy bags has only happened fairly recently and some parents have not made the connection that being made of plastic, they also pose a suffocation risk¹.

Both nappy bags and baby slings come under the General Product Safety Regulations 2005. This requires that products must be safe. One of the factors to consider when assessing the safety of the product is any warnings or information regarding the product however the existence of higher levels of safety, or availability of products presenting a lesser risk, will not in itself mean that a product is unsafe. Therefore those products without any safety warnings or information are not automatically unsafe just because there are some products with warnings.

¹ <http://www.rospace.com/campaigns-fundraising/current/nappy-sacks/>

Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards led on the TSSE region project on childcare articles focusing on nappy bags and baby slings. Other authorities in the region that took part were Isle of Wight, Reading and West Berkshire.

Objectives and Project Deliverables

- 1) Achieve a greater understanding of the range of nappy bag products that are currently on the market, who is producing them and the warnings that are on the product with regard to baby safety;
- 2) Achieve a greater understanding of the range of baby sling products that are currently on the market, who is producing them, where they are being made and the warnings that accompany the product with regard to baby safety;
- 3) Collate a database of the main producers, importers/suppliers and manufacturers of nappy bags and baby slings, together with details of what warnings currently appear on the packaging;
- 4) Disseminate that information and intelligence accordingly via the intelligence networks, Ports project and other relevant projects;
- 5) Publicity via social media accounts;
- 6) Make appropriate primary/home authority referrals;
- 7) Explore possibilities of publicity and/or working in partnership with RoSPA.

Methodology

With four participating authorities from the TSSE region the project was divided up so one authority looks at nappy bags sold online, one authority looks at nappy bag sold on the high street, one authority looks at baby slings sold online and one authority looks at baby slings sold on the high street.

Isle of Wight Trading Standards were tasked with purchasing nappy bags online. Reading Trading Standards were tasked with purchasing nappy bags on the high street. West Berkshire & Wokingham Trading Standards were tasked with buying baby slings online. Buckinghamshire & Surrey Trading Standards were tasked with buying baby slings on the high street.

This was a market surveillance project to gain a greater understanding of what products are on the market and how many are providing warnings and information to parents about using and storing the product safely. It had been decided not to submit the products for further testing. Each authority was asked to make test purchases and record details about the products. Purchases were made online and from shops on the high street, although some products were just examined in the shops and no test purchase made.

The purchases and examinations were carried out between January and March 2016.

Results

The aim was to buy products from sellers in the TSSE region wherever possible to gain intelligence on regional sellers including sellers that may not have been previously known to Trading Standards. If it was not possible to identify regional sellers or once the regional sellers had been exhausted, further purchases were to be made from UK sellers. This was to try to ensure as many different products as possible had been examined and any problems with the product could be referred to the local Trading Standards for follow up.

Nappy Bags

33 different nappy bag products were purchased or examined. The cheapest were part of the the budget value ranges offered by retailers like the big supermarkets and these cost about 35p for a pack of 100. No products cost more than £5.

The products were bought from the following types of retailers:

- 16 were bought or examined on the high street from local branches of national chains;
- From the remaining 17:
 - 1 came from an independent local shop in the TSSE region;
 - 14 came from retailers within the UK;
 - 2 were bought online with no further address details for the sellers.

The locations of the manufacturers/importers of the products were as follows:

- 26 were either made by imported by companies in the UK;
- 3 were made by other companies within Europe;
- There was no information recorded for the remaining 4 products.

There was a variety of safety information and warnings provided with the products, and some had no information or warnings at all:

- 3 (9%) had no safety information or warnings at all on the box;
- 1 (3%) did not have any information in English on the packaging but did have a picture warning about not leaving the product in the reach of babies;
- The remaining 29 (88%) did have safety information or warnings on the packaging of the product about the risk of suffocation and/or to keep the products away from children/babies.

Only 1 product came on a roll; the rest were loose bags in a box/packet, although some did have a rigid plastic opening that could be clipped shut. It is harder for a baby to pull a nappy bag that is on a roll than an individual bag.

Some examples of the warnings that appeared on the products are:

Warning: to avoid suffocation keep bags away from babies & children.

These bags have been manufactured on a roll for safety reasons. It is far more difficult for a baby or small child to access these bags if perforated on a roll. **Do NOT leave bags in cots prams or playpens.**

Caution: Plastic bags can cause suffocation, keep this product out of reach of children.

Baby Slings

13 slings were bought and examined from a range of retailers. The slings ranged in price from £12.99 to £40.99. There were problems with West Berkshire's address for covert purchases and one sling was never delivered from one retailer, even though their records showed it had been signed for, meaning the total number of slings examined was lower than it could have been.

The products were bought from the following types of retailers:

- 16 were bought or examined on the high street from local branches of national chains;

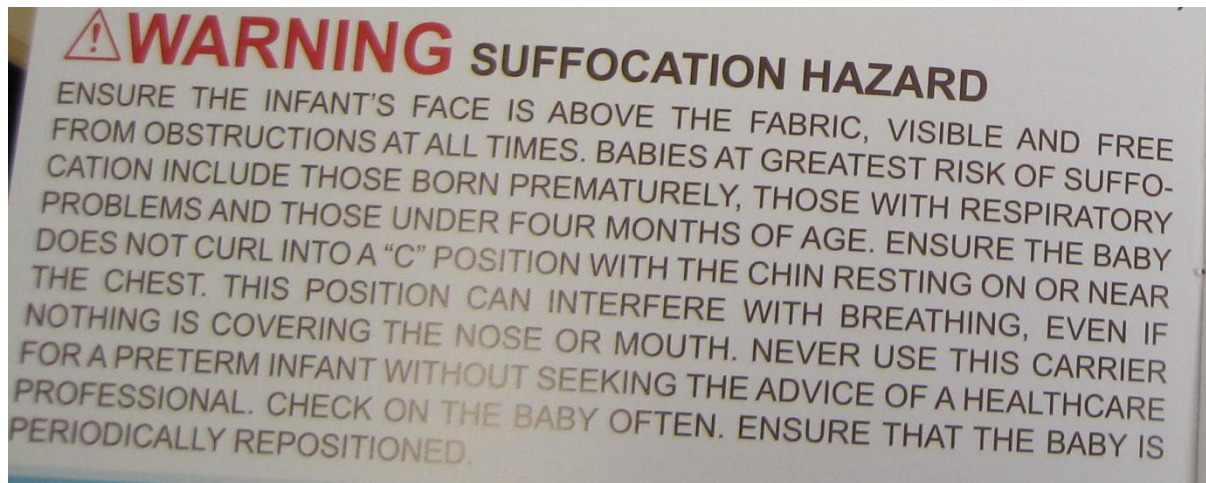
The locations of the sellers were as follows:

- 4 slings were bought from sellers in the TSSE region;
- 8 came from retailers within the UK;
- 1 was bought online with no further address details for the sellers.

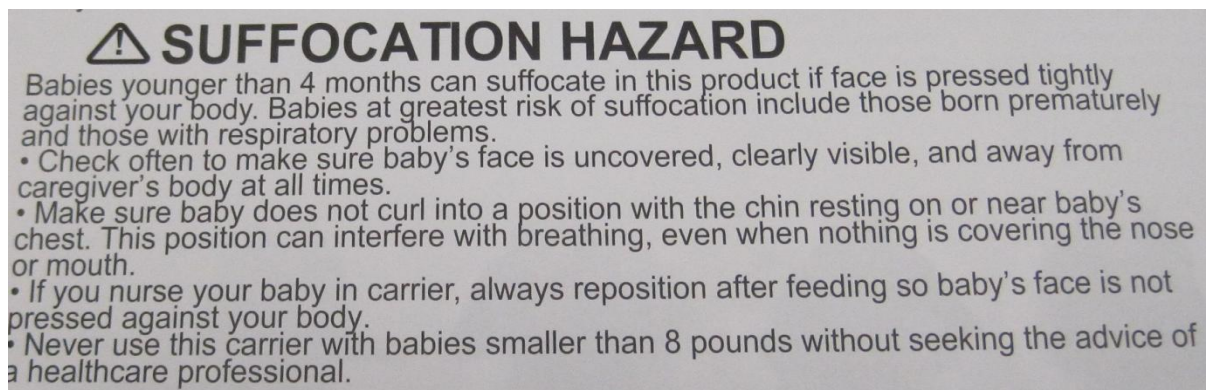
There was a variety of safety information and warnings provided with the products, and some had no information or warnings at all:

- 4 (30%) baby slings had no safety information;
- 9 (70%) did have some safety information with the product.

Below are some examples of the other warnings and safety information that came with the products:



- Ensure your child's chin is not resting on its chest as its breathing may be restricted which could lead to suffocation.



Some of the slings referred to compliance with BS EN 13209-2:2005. This is a British Standard for baby carriers. The warnings that are required to accompany the product under this Standard are warnings that the wearer's balance may be affected by your movement and your child's movement, to take care when bending or leaning forward and to not use the product during sport. There are no requirements in this Standard regarding the provision of warnings about the risk of suffocation.

Conclusions

Nappy Bags

The project examined 33 different brands of nappy bag products from a range of retailers. These retailers included national supermarket chains, national discount chains as well as internet sales from sellers on eBay and Amazon Marketplace. Although there were a few obvious retailers that we were unable to purchase from in

the end, overall we purchased/examined a reasonable number of products across a wide variety of retailers.

29 (88%) of products examined had some sort of warning about the risk of suffocation. However just one warning specifically referenced products not being left near cots etc. It is thought that leaving the products in a cot or a playpen could be a contributing factor to the child fatalities as they are often within reach of the baby.

Only 1 of the nappy bag products were sold on a roll, the rest were loose bags in a packet. It is harder for a baby to pull a nappy bag that is on a roll² than individual nappy bags from a box. 3 of the products were in plastic packaging but had a rigid plastic opening that could be clipped shut. Assuming this was always closed after use this would also stop a baby grabbing a hold of a loose bag.

25 products were confirmed to come from UK retailers and suppliers. The 2 products without warnings both came from UK sellers and referrals were made to the appropriate local Trading Standards department.

The products without warnings were both bought online from eBay or Amazon Marketplace; however there were 6 other nappy bags bought via these platforms that did come with warnings.

Baby Slings

The project examined thirteen baby slings from a range of retailers from internet sellers with accounts on eBay and Amazon Marketplace to specialist baby boutiques to national retailers.

4 of the baby slings had no safety information or warnings with them and all of these had been sold by internet sellers with eBay and Amazon Marketplace accounts. Home authority referrals were made in relation to those products with no warnings or safety information for the local Trading Standards to follow up as they deemed necessary.

General Trends

The products without warnings tended to be those bought online from eBay and Amazon Marketplace sellers and in particular those products coming from the Far East. This is not an unexpected trend due to the lower levels of safety for products originating from places like China

Participating authorities were told to inform each other of the products they had bought and to avoid buying duplicate products. However where duplicates were found the details of that retailer/supplier were also not recorded. This means that the database of suppliers is not as comprehensive as it could have been and so this aim of the project has not been fully met.

² <http://www.rospa.com/campaigns-fundraising/current/nappy-sacks/>

Recommendations

The project identified that not all nappy bag and baby sling products come with safety warnings and instructions so consideration could be given to making it mandatory for these products to carry appropriate warnings. Other things to consider could be promoting to industry the benefits of the nappy bags being sold perforated on a roll³ rather than individually loose in a packet or requiring the packet to have a closable clipped opening as was observed on some of the products.

Six home authority referrals were made to the local Trading Standards service for the retailers and importers of the three nappy bag products which had no information or warnings about the suffocation risk posed by the nappy bags and the importance of keeping the bags out of the reach of babies. Two further home authority referral were made in relation to baby slings that had no safety information, including one whose website was non-compliant with the requirements of the Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013.

Throughout the project Buckinghamshire & Surrey Trading Standards have been in discussions with Sheila Merrill at RoSPA and the results and report from this project are to be disseminated to them.

Once the results have been released and absorbed the intention is to do a joint press release and to look for publicity via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as well as the RoSPA newsletter. The data collected will also be used to influence change in the industry. RoSPA is well placed to do this as it works with the British Retail Consortium and other partners to influence change in the marketplace.

Summary

Background and Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards have a successful history of investigating complaints relating to the safety of childcare products;• Sadly there have been known instances where babies have died as a result of suffocation from a nappy bag or in a baby sling;• This is a market surveillance project to find out what products are out there and what information and warnings are being given to parents about baby safety.
Objectives and Project Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achieve a greater understanding of the range of nappy bag and baby sling products currently on the market, who is producing them and the safety warnings that are on the product;• Collate a database of the main producers, importers/suppliers and manufacturers of nappy bags and baby slings, together with details of what warnings currently appear on the packaging;• Disseminate information and intelligence accordingly via the intelligence networks, Ports project and other relevant projects;• Publicity via social media accounts;• Make appropriate primary/home authority referrals;• Explore possibilities of publicity and/or working partnership with RoSPA.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project lead by Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards

³ <http://www.rospace.com/campaigns-fundraising/current/nappy-sacks/>

	<p>with participation from other TSSE authorities: West Berkshire & Wokingham, Reading and Isle of Wight;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across the four authorities test purchases to be made of nappy bags and baby slings and collate information about retailers, manufacturers/importers and the safety information provided.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33 nappy bag products were bought/examined from a range of retailers (national supermarkets, national discount chains, online retailers). 29 (88%) had a warning about the suffocation risk, 3 (9%) had no warnings at all and 1 (3%) had no information in English but did have a picture warning about keeping the product away from babies; • 13 baby slings were bought/examined from a range of retailers (national chains and internet sellers). 9 (70%) had warnings about the safety of the baby whilst in the sling.
Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Products were bought from a range of retailers; • The baby slings sold by internet retailers and originating from the Far East were lacking warnings and instructions. Due to the nature of internet sellers on sites such as eBay and Amazon Marketplace and the lower levels of safety in the Far East this was not unexpected.
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that some products did not have warnings does not mean that those products are presumed unsafe under the General Product Safety Regulations 2005; • However 5x5x5s were submitted and home authority referrals were made for the nappy bags and baby slings which provided no warnings or information about baby safety; • Consideration could be given to improving the safety by requiring warnings on such products and with the nappy bags requiring that they be manufactured on a roll or in packaging with a closable lid; • Publicity of the results through social media and press releases to be considered once report released to BIS and consultation with RoSPA.