What requirements should home decoration products and home textiles comply with to be allowed on the European market?

For home decoration and home textile products, legal requirements focus mainly on consumer health and safety. Products should function well and risks should be minimised; for example, by avoiding hazardous chemicals. Trade in wildlife and timber products is also restricted. Both social and environmental sustainability are becoming increasingly common requirements. There is an interesting niche market for certified sustainable and Fairtrade home products.

Contents of this page
1. What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?
2. What additional requirements do buyers often have?
3. What are the requirements for niche markets?

1. What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?

The European Union has several laws applying to home decoration and home textile products. Several of these directives and regulations may apply to a single product. This study gives an overview of all relevant requirements for the whole sector of home decoration and home textiles (HDHT), with all its diverse products and materials.

Tips:

- Contact Open Trade Gate Sweden if you have specific questions on rules and requirements in Sweden and the European Union.
- Ask the Ministry of Trade or Business Service organisations in your country for help.
- Contact testing institutes about what needs testing and what the standards are (for example, SGS, Bureau Veritas or Tüv).
- Ask your new or existing buyer for advice, as well as your colleagues in export.

General Product Safety Directive

The European Union’s General Product Safety Directive applies to all consumer products. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use. You should only place safe products on
the market and inform consumers of any potential risks associated with your products. You must also make sure that any products on the market can be traced, so dangerous products can be removed.

Unsafe products are rejected at the European border or withdrawn from the market. The RAPEX database lists such products.

In 2013, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Product Safety and Market Surveillance Package. These regulations would simplify market surveillance of non-food products, and put more emphasis on product identification and traceability. So far, however, the Council has not reached an agreement on this proposal.

Tips:
- Read more on the General Product Safety Directive.
- Check the RAPEX database to gain an idea of what issues may arise with your type of product.
- Follow the legislative procedure of the proposed Product Safety and Market Surveillance Package.
- Use your common sense to ensure that the normal use of your product does not cause any danger.

CE marking of toys and electronic products
CE marking shows that a product has been assessed before being placed on the market and that it meets European requirements for safety, health and environmental protection. The European Union has set specific requirements for a variety of categories, including the Toy Safety Directive, the Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive and the Low Voltage Directive.

If you produce toys or electronic products (such as decorative lighting), your products will need CE marking in order to be allowed on the European market. In addition, electronic products must be labelled according to their energy efficiency. In July 2017, the European Commission published a new Energy Labelling Regulation as a gradual replacement of the Energy Labelling Directive.

Tips:
- If you produce toys or electronic products, study how to meet the requirements of the Toy Safety Directive, Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive, Low Voltage Directive and Energy Labelling Regulation.
- To affix CE marking to your products, follow the steps outlined at CE Marking for Manufacturers. It provides instructions per product group.
- Stay up to date on the roll-out of the Energy Labelling Regulation.

Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH)
The so-called REACH Regulation restricts the use of chemicals in products that are marketed in
Europe. Which chemicals are relevant for you depends on your specific products and materials.

For example, REACH restricts the use of:

- Several azo dyes used particularly for textile products;
- Lead in the paints and glazing of ceramics;
- Cadmium compounds in various applications;
- Arsenic and creosotes as wood preservatives;
- Flame retardants, including TRIS, TEPA and PBB;
- organostannic compounds and phthalates in PVC.

**Tips:**

- The European Chemical Agency (ECHA) provides useful information and tips on REACH. See, for example, Substances restricted under REACH (Annex XVII), Information on REACH for companies established outside the European Union and Questions & Answers on REACH.
- Follow new developments in the field of flame retardants, as new alternatives are being developed. You can do so, for instance, through the European Flame Retardants Association (EFRA).

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**Food Contact Materials**

Food safety is of major concern in Europe. Safety measures reach further than food itself to cover materials that come into direct contact with food. The Food Contact Materials regulations include home decoration products such as kitchenware and tableware. These products should not release substances of which they are composed into food at levels that may be harmful to consumer health. The regulation also sets out rules for the labelling of Food Contact Materials.

**Tips:**

- Read more on the legislation for Food Contact Materials. You can also download a brochure in your language.
- Also see the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for more information on Food Contact Materials.

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**Products resembling foodstuffs**

According to the Directive on products resembling foodstuffs, products that imitate food so closely that they could be confused for edible products are not allowed on the European market. This fact could be due to, for example, their shape, colour, smell, appearance and size. Because children could be tempted to eat them, these food-imitating products pose a choking hazard. A variety of products fall within this category, such as food-shaped candles and soaps.

**Tip:**

- For an idea of what kind of product is prohibited, see Examples of food-imitating products against which the Member States have taken measures.
Wildlife Trade Regulations and CITES

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) restricts the international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants to ensure it does not threaten their survival. This Convention includes wildlife products derived from these species, such as timber or exotic leather goods.

The European Union implements CITES through the Wildlife Trade Regulations. These regulations actually go beyond the requirements of the Convention in some respects. For example, they include more species than the standard CITES list and set some stricter import conditions.

Tips:
- For a user-friendly version, see the Reference Guide to the Wildlife Trade Regulations.
- To make sure that you do not use prohibited materials in your products, check the list of species in Annexes A, B, C and D of the Wildlife Trade Regulations.
- For an overview of how the Wildlife Trade Regulations differ from CITES, see The Differences between EU and CITES Provisions in a Nutshell.
- For more information on CITES permits, you can contact your National CITES Management Authority.

Timber Regulation

The European Union’s Timber Regulation aims to counter illegal logging. It also applies to home decoration products such as wooden furniture or decorative objects. Recycled products and printed papers are not included.

To comply, your European buyers must prove that any timber used was harvested legally. You must be able to provide them with information such as the tree species, origin of the wood, and compliance with national laws and regulations. Products with a FLEGT or CITES licence also comply with the Timber Regulation.

Tips:
- For more information, see the Frequently Asked Questions about the Timber Regulation and the Guidance Document.
- See the FLEGT License Information Point for more information about FLEG licensing.

Textile Regulation

The European Union’s Textile Regulation states that textile products should be labelled or marked to indicate their fibre composition. These labels should be durable and tear-resistant, securely attached, easily legible, visible and accessible. The main purpose of this regulation is to ensure that consumers know exactly what they are buying when purchasing textile products.
Liability for defective products

The Directive on liability for defective products entitles consumers to compensation if a product bought in the European Union is damaged or does not work. Producers have to provide compensation if a defective product causes damage to consumers or their property. Technically, the importer (your buyer) is liable, but they may pass on a claim to you. This Directive is up for evaluation in 2017.

Packaging

The European Union’s Directive on Packaging and Packaging Waste aims to prevent or reduce a negative impact on the environment. For example, it sets recovery and recycling targets, and restricts the use of certain heavy metals. This fact means that packaging design must incorporate these aims while also considering the marketing aims of attractive packaging, as well as of course protecting the product.

There are also requirements for wood packaging materials (WPM) used for transport. These requirements apply to, for example, packing cases, boxes, crates, drums, pallets, box pallets and dunnage.

2. What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability are increasingly important on the European market. Think of sustainable raw materials and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand compliance with the following schemes:

The Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) is an initiative of European retailers, aiming to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. Buyers expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once your company is audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe that make or grow
consumer goods.
You can use standards such as ISO 14001 and SA 8000 or read up on sustainable options. However, only niche market buyers demand compliance.

**Tips:**
- Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on.
- Buyers appreciate a good story. If you can show that you have considered your company’s performance, this fact may yield a competitive advantage. You can do so with a self-assessment such as the BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers, or a code of conduct such as the BSCI Code of Conduct or the ETI base code.
- Read more about BSCI and ETI on the ITC Standards Map.
- For more information, see our special study of sustainability in the home sector.

3. What are the requirements for niche markets?

As sustainability gains ground, there is a growing niche market for certified sustainable home decoration and home textile products.

**Fair trade**

The concept of Fairtrade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially for labour-intensive products such as handicraft objects, Fairtrade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common Fairtrade certifications are issued by:
- World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO)
- Fairtrade International
- Fair for Life

**Tips:**
- Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the Fairtrade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.
- Read more about the WFTO, Fairtrade International and Fair for Life programmes on the ITC Standards Map.
- Determine which certification programme would be the best fit for you and apply if possible.

**Textile certification**

The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is a textile-processing standard for organic fibres. It ensures environmental and social responsibility throughout the production chain of textile products. To qualify for GOTS certification, textile products must contain at least 70% organic fibres.
OEKO-TEX Standard 100 certification guarantees that no hazardous chemicals were used in the production of textiles. This standard includes the chemicals banned by the European REACH regulations.

The EU Ecolabel strives to minimise products’ environmental impact. Textile products generally have the strongest impact when they are dyed, printed and bleached. As a result, the criteria for textiles focus on minimising harm at the manufacturing stage.

Woolmark certification focuses on quality rather than sustainability. It provides consumers with guaranteed wool fibre content and an assurance of quality. The programme contains specific standards for several product groups, including blankets, bedspreads, rugs, throws and carpets.

Tips:
- Read more about GOTS, OEKO-TEX and the EU Ecolabel on the ITC Standards Map.
- Determine which certification programme would be the best fit for you and apply if possible.

Ethical carpets
There are several ethical initiatives focused specifically on the carpet industry.

GoodWeave (formerly known as Rugmark) works to end child labour in the carpet industry of South Asia. You can search retailers per country for an indication of the relevance on your target market.

Label STEP is present on the Swiss, Austrian, French and German markets. Key issues are the working and living conditions of carpet weavers as well as the fight against abusive child labour.

Care & Fair aims to combat illegal child labour and improve the situation of carpet-knotting families in India, Nepal and Pakistan. Care & Fair has around 400 members in 21 consumer countries.

Tips:
- To target the ethical niche market, you need to find business partners in this niche. Study the initiatives and their working methods to determine whether your company would be a good match.
- Read more about GoodWeave on the ITC Standards Map.
- Determine which certification programme would be the best fit for you and apply if possible.

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)
FSC certification is the most common label for sustainable wooden products, including paper. The FSC label guarantees that a product’s source material comes from responsibly managed forests. These products are especially popular on western European markets.
Tips:

- Determine whether FSC certification is an option for you and apply if possible. For more information on the process, see the three steps towards FSC certification.
- If you use recycled paper, you can apply for the FSC Recycled label.
- Read more about FSC certification on the ITS Standards Map.

For a full overview of all voluntary standards for your product, select your product on the ITC Standards Map.

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