



## Sustainability

**How CPIN plays an essential role in enabling consumers to live sustainable lifestyles**

### **BSI Consumer & Public Interest Network (CPIN)**

CPIN is an independent network of volunteers trained to represent the UK consumer voice in standards. CPIN focuses its work in five priority areas:

- Consumer safety
- Consumer vulnerability
- Digital
- Services
- **Sustainability**



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Sustainability has never been more important; tackling climate change is on all nations' agendas, with a global demand to minimize carbon emissions. 'The sustainable consumer' was the theme of World Consumer Rights day 2020 highlighting the need for sustainable consumption and the important role of consumer rights and protection [#sustainableconsumer](#).

Consumers are increasingly making sustainable choices; reducing, reusing and recycling. However, challenges include inconsistent or misleading labelling, a postcode lottery for UK recycling, and the inability to

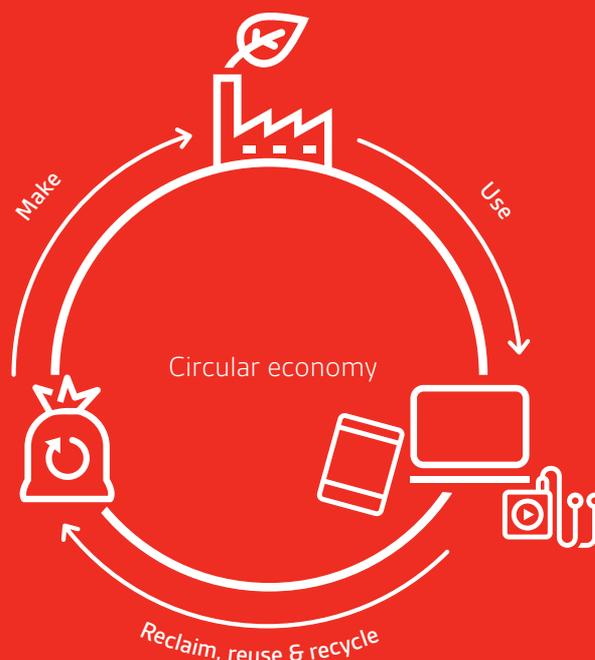
repair household appliances. Consumers need industry and government to implement sustainable practices along supply chains and to deliver appropriate products, tools and advice.



## The circular economy

Moving away from the traditional 'take-make-dispose' system, a 'circular economy' minimizes waste and seeks to retain the value of the materials used in the manufacture of products and delivery of services for as long as possible, through increased reuse, repair and recycling.

David Fatscher, Head of Environmental, Social and Governance standards at BSI, highlights the role that standards can play. He says: 'The government's 2018 Resource & Waste Strategy commits the UK to a system which keeps materials in use for longer and BSI's pioneering BS 8001 – capturing the principles of circularity – demonstrates how standards can help organizations unlock the untapped potential of cleaner growth.'



## Planning and promoting a sustainable future; what's already being done

Sustainability is one of CPIN's five priority areas. It is essential for consumers to live in a sustainable world, and to be given the tools that let them contribute to this.

The [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), agreed in 2015, provide a foundations upon which initiatives can be based to achieve the goals by 2030. They encompass the direct need to protect our environment through, for example, the conservation of marine resources, and measures that will facilitate sustainable economic development without unduly harming society.

### What is the UK government doing?

The [2015 Paris Agreement's](#) central aim is to keep a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to try to limit the temperature increase further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The UK has set itself a legally binding target of net zero emissions by 2050. Measures include banning the new sale of any but zero-emission cars by 2035, and a financial commitment to support low carbon innovation.

At a European level, commitments include new EU 'right to repair' rules; from 2021, firms must make appliances longer-lasting, and supply spare parts for machines for up to 10 years. There are also requirements to make appliances more energy-efficient.

### What are consumer groups doing?

In 2015, Consumers International published a report identifying the clear role that consumer protection has to play in meeting the SDGs. For example:

'Action and mechanisms to address unfair market practices, misleading advertising and to inform consumers are a central and necessary part of economic systems....strong consumer protection can encourage the creation of employment and decent work indirectly through support for sustainable economic growth and improved consumer awareness.'<sup>1</sup>

UK consumer organizations are embracing their role in influencing manufacturers, and educating consumers.

Which?, for example, is building sustainability across its work streams. Its Head of Product Testing told us: 'Which? is reflecting consumers' increasing concerns about sustainability by highlighting Which?'s brand level durability and lifespan insights. We are adding insights from our reparability pilot tests and building sustainability criteria into Best Buys. If you can't buy a replacement battery for a cordless vac, we won't award a Best Buy.'

1. Excerpts taken from 2015 Consumers International report: The role of consumer protection in meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals



## What does 'living sustainably' mean for consumers?

Sustainability is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (See *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*). Consumers, industry and government can support this by, for example:

### Consumer action

Making homes more energy efficient

Reducing the volume of household packaging waste

Choosing sustainably produced food

Repair/upgrade products

Rejecting 'fast fashion' trends for items that are worn a few times then thrown away, and may be produced using forced labour

### Industry/government action

Provide energy efficiency, information and advice, can be supported by grants

**Industry:** reduce packaging for consumer products. Use easy-to-recycle packaging  
**Government:** improve recycling facilities

Provide accessible, verified labelling schemes

Provide consumer products designed for safe repair/software upgrade throughout their life

**Industry:** drive consumer demand for sustainable fashion through both manufacturing processes and marketing  
**Government:** provide facilities to reuse and recycle items

## Sustainability and standards

Standards play a vital role in improving outcomes for consumers, detailing good practice for organizations such as government, public authorities, and industry to follow

Standards can encourage organizations to think about sustainable practice, whether in procurement, design, development or delivery. BSI's Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN) (see 'What is CPIN?') makes sure that the needs of UK consumers are considered in the development of all relevant UK and international standards. Standards are increasingly playing a role in supporting sustainability.

Some standards are product or service specific. For example, [ISO 21401](#) specifies the environmental, social and economic requirements for implementing a sustainability management system in tourist accommodation. Meanwhile, product specification standards can require manufacturers to build products that are easy and safe to repair or be used to inform public policy, such as the [EU energy label](#).

Other standards take a principles-led approach that can be used by all organizations, including business, government and consumer

groups to assess and compare good practice. These include [ISO 26000 Social Responsibility](#) and [BS 8001 Circular Economy](#).

ISO COPOLCO has been active in proposing and coordinating consumer participation in sustainability-related standards work, including environmental labelling, the trade of second hand goods (including via online marketplaces) and ethical claims.

Overall, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has identified hundreds of international standards that contribute to the [UN's SDGs](#).

As Scott Steedman, BSI Director of Standards and Vice President of ISO, puts it: 'If we are to achieve the UN SDGs, international standards need to be a universal language for consumers everywhere.'

# Key consumer issues

CPIN's work is guided by the consumer principles, which helps to address key issues relating to sustainability and ensure nothing vital is missed

## Access

Several factors can affect consumers' access to sustainable products and services. Wales is recognised as a leading country for **recycling**, thanks in part to policies to standardise refuse and recycling collections. However in London, where kerbside collection facilities vary by council, recycling rates are falling short of meeting the government target of 50% of council-collected waste to be recycled by 2030.

Lack of internet access can also restrict access to online-only sustainable products and services – for example, some 'green' energy tariffs that are only available online. Meanwhile consumers' ability to install a home charging point and interoperability issues can influence Electric Vehicle (EV) uptake. Standards can lead the way in developing innovative solutions.

## Choice

Consumers can influence business practice by making sustainable choices, and by only doing business with companies that behave and operate ethically.

Ideally, all consumer choices would be sustainable; for example, all energy tariffs would be produced from renewable sources by default. Until then, more must be done to make sustainable choices easy.

Widespread concern over plastic in our oceans has prompted many to buy food products with less, or more recyclable, plastic packaging, and in turn prompted supermarkets to commit to reducing plastic. However, consumer demand alone can't deliver the outcomes required; government and industry have a responsibility to provide sustainable products and services.

Sustainable choice is rarely black and white. From 2035, the UK government has banned the sale of new diesel, petrol and hybrid cars. Yet, while widespread uptake of electric cars will undoubtedly reduce toxic gas emissions, electric car batteries contain a finite resource: lithium, the extraction of which can harm the environment<sup>2</sup>. Solutions may include easy and effective battery recycling, or alternative power sources.

## Information

Consumers wishing make sustainable choices require trustworthy and clear information. Consumers may struggle to know what 'sustainable' labelling means and whether claims are genuine. **ISO/TS 17033:2019**, Ethical claims and supporting information, offers guidelines on making robust, credible and verifiable sustainability claims.

Ethical Consumer Director Alex Crumbie says: 'Ethical Consumer has been tracking corporate sustainability for decades. Companies must show they take sustainability seriously. While some have made genuine progress, many lag behind. The prevalence of "greenwashing" – the mere facade of sustainability – makes it essential for independent organizations to advise consumers, so they can choose to do business with companies that practise what they preach.'

## Redress

If things go wrong, or if a product or service is not as claimed, consumers need access to effective redress systems. Some poor practice poses widespread risk to consumer safety, and may require collective action. European consumer organization BEUC has been coordinating the activities of national consumer organizations in taking action against Volkswagen as the car manufacturer at the centre of the 2015 car emissions scandal.

Consumers who have purchased a product or service that they believe to be sustainable must be able to complain if the claims made about it prove to be false, or misleading. Standards such as **BS 8543** and **ISO 10002** offer detailed guidance about how to design and manage effective complaint handling systems.

## Representation

With ethical behaviour increasingly driven by consumer demand, it's essential that consumers are at the table to help businesses understand how sustainable practice can benefit their organization, customers, and the planet. Representation can include lobbying by NGOs, and even individuals, and the engagement by organizations of consumer stakeholders.

Standards are increasingly being developed that incorporate good practice 'ethics' for organizations to follow. See **CPIN's leaflet 'Ethics in standards.'**

## Safety

Failure to embrace sustainable practices has consequences for safety. Climate change has fuelled an increasing number of natural disasters, many prompted by extreme weather.

The proliferation of microplastics created as a by-product of manufacturing processes, for example plastic bottles, which may be eaten or absorbed by animals and other organisms poses direct harm to these creatures and, if they form part of human food chains, an indirect risk to consumers.

Even some products claiming to be more sustainable are not problem-free. For example, it is not always clear how plastic bags labelled as 'biodegradable' should be recycled. Some may even break down into microplastics. Standards can help address this by offering a true test of biodegradability and outlining requirements for manufacturers to meet.

## Sustainability

Standards can help to minimize the environmental impact of the products and services we use, and help us live more sustainably. The positive environmental impact that the efficient consumption of essential resources, such as energy and water, can have should not be underestimated. Investment in improved home insulation can reduce the use of energy for heating or cooling without affecting consumer comfort. Digital innovations, such as energy smart appliances, potentially offer consumers the ability to better control energy use. CPIN representation on PAS 1878 Energy Smart Appliances is helping ensure consumer benefits are promoted and any risks addressed.

Some organizations are successfully reducing their use of energy and water. Traditional processes for dyeing jeans use gallons of water for each pair produced. Brands including **Levi's** and **Wrangler** are moving towards waterless processes that the companies claim reduce the use of water for dyeing by 96% and 100% respectively.

According to Which?, the UK throws out 10.2m tonnes of food each year – 70% of which comes from UK households. Food left in bin bags and sent to landfill rots and releases methane – the greenhouse gas emissions of this waste are equivalent to the annual emissions of 3.5m cars<sup>3</sup>. Innovative standards solutions must be sought to reduce the scale of the problem.

2. Which?, The problem with cordless appliances', August 2018

3. Which?, 'It's time to wise up about food waste', July 2019

## What is CPIN?

The Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN) is an independent network of volunteers trained to represent the consumer voice in standards. Supported by the British Standards Institution (BSI), CPIN works closely with consumer and public interest organizations to:

- Ensure that standards address real issues that matter to real people
- Give a voice to all consumers, including children, older people and those with disabilities
- Add value to standards to benefit both consumers and businesses, by helping them better address consumer needs and gain their customers' trust.

CPIN focuses its work in five priority areas, where it believes there is high potential for consumer detriment, and standards can have a positive impact in addressing this harm:

- Consumer safety
- Consumer vulnerability
- Digital
- Services
- Sustainability

For more information about CPIN's work, or to find out how to get involved, please:

Email:  
[consumer@bsigroup.com](mailto:consumer@bsigroup.com)

OR

Visit:  
[www.bsigroup.com/consumers](http://www.bsigroup.com/consumers)

## Further information

### ANEC

European consumer voice in standards

[anec.eu](http://anec.eu)

 [@anectweet](https://twitter.com/anectweet)

### BSI

UK's national standards body. To find out more about standards or to get involved:

[bsigroup.com](http://bsigroup.com)

 [@bsi\\_UK](https://twitter.com/bsi_UK)

### Consumers International

A membership organization that brings together 200+ consumer groups worldwide

[consumersinternational.org](http://consumersinternational.org)

 [@consumers\\_int](https://twitter.com/consumers_int)

### ISO COPOLCO

Consumer Policy Committee of the International Organization for Standardization

[iso.org/copolco](http://iso.org/copolco)

 [@ISOConsumers](https://twitter.com/ISOConsumers)



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