



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### EU Expert Group Highlights Global Best Practices for Product Traceability

*New report cites the adoption of GS1 Global Supply Chain Standards as a best practice for enhanced traceability, faster recalls and improved consumer safety*

**Brussels, Belgium – January 17, 2014** – As the industry prepares for upcoming consumer safety regulations around certain non-food, non-healthcare products, an expert group set up by the European Commission recognised the adoption of GS1 Standards as a best practice in addressing supply chain traceability needs.

Adoption of traceability standards was just one of several recommendations highlighted in a report released by the group following two years of industry-wide dialogue. These recommendations focus on benefits for not only businesses and consumers, but also for market surveillance authorities with the common goal of protecting public safety and health.

“As supply chains continue to span the globe and consumers purchase more products online, ensuring traceability has become more challenging,” said Maija Laurila, Head of the Product and Service Safety unit at the European Commission's Directorate General Health and Consumers (DG SANCO) and chairwoman of the traceability expert group. “The ability to track and trace products helps properly identify dangerous products and remove them from the market more rapidly. It would be interesting to see educational traceability assessment exercises conducted jointly with the businesses or trade associations and market surveillance authorities. In addition, global standards contribute to the success of traceability systems and to overall consumer protection.”

DG SANCO set up the Product Traceability Expert Group in 2011 to address concerns about the traceability of dangerous products in the context of RAPEX (the EU Rapid Alert System for non-food dangerous products). The Expert Group focused on identifying best practices while European institutions prepare requirements of the future EU regulation for the safety of non-food products such as clothing, textile and fashion items, childcare articles, kitchen accessories and furniture.

GS1 was invited to participate in the expert group and was awarded a contract to provide neutral research and facilitate the group's work. The group's report outlined the following recommendations:

- **For economic operators**, the group recommends labeling consumer products with product identification codes and automating traceability systems using global standards such as ISO and GS1 Standards
- **For market surveillance and other authorities**, the group recommends including the use of barcodes in training and, conducting traceability assessments in cooperation with private actors as well as developing best practices to collect information about dangerous products when they cross EU borders.
- **For consumers**, the group suggests raising more awareness on the importance of product identification and helping consumers alert authorities about suspicious or potentially dangerous products.



“We are humbled and proud that our standards were recognised by this esteemed, international group of supply-chain stakeholders,” said Miguel Lopera, President and CEO of GS1. “As a neutral, not-for-profit organisation, this is an example of the type of collaborative work we conduct on a regular basis around the globe. We hope this recognition will encourage wider-scale adoption of GS1 Standards for traceability in order to improve consumer safety and benefit businesses.”

Consumers will also benefit from improved product traceability. “If a public safety issue occurs, efficient traceability systems will help market surveillance authorities’ determine if a dangerous product is present and take prompt corrective measures,” said Andrew Abercrombie of the Hampshire Trading Standards Service UK. “This also helps ensure that proper information about dangerous products is given to consumers in the event of a recall.”

“Many companies may have their own effective traceability systems, but if they cannot communicate with other supply chain partners on harmonized product information through interoperable standards, traceability may stop at their walls, leading to higher collective costs and a more complicated recall process – among other issues.” said Emilie Prouzet, Directrice Europe, FCD, France.

Aside from GS1, members of the traceability expert group included EU market surveillance authorities as well as representatives from manufacturing, retail, industry, consumer and advisory organisations including the European Traceability Institute, the French Federation of Retail and Trade, Altroconsumo, and others.

To view the Product Traceability Expert Group’s full report, visit [http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/projects/ongoing-projects\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/projects/ongoing-projects_en.htm).

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#### **About GS1**

GS1 is a neutral, not-for-profit, global organisation that develops and maintains the most widely-used supply chain standards system in the world. GS1 standards improve the efficiency, safety, and visibility of supply chains across multiple sectors.

With local Member Organisations in over 110 countries, GS1 engages with communities of trading partners, industry organisations, governments, and technology providers to understand and respond to their business needs through the adoption and implementation of global standards.

GS1 is driven by over a million user companies, which execute more than six billion transactions daily in 150 countries using GS1 standards. More information at [www.gs1.org](http://www.gs1.org).



## **Report from the EU Product Traceability Expert Group** ***Key Messages for GS1 Member Organisations***

A traceability expert group set up by the European Commission released a report in December 2013 highlighting best practices for improving supply chain traceability and consumer product safety.

GS1 was selected as one of the 15 expert members of the Product Traceability Expert Group, which was established in 2011 by the European Commission's Directorate General Health and Consumers to address traceability and product safety issues. In addition, GS1 provided the research support and facilitated the group as a neutral organisation with expertise in community collaboration and problem-solving.

### **What were the main objectives of the traceability expert group?**

The main goal of the group was to take a voluntary, collaborative and proactive step toward improving the traceability of non-food products in order to improve consumer safety. More specifically, the group made inquiries into existing – or non-existent - best practices in traceability throughout Europe and the world in order to make recommendations to authorities and businesses on how to improve traceability in European product supply chains. The expert group also worked to ensure that Member State authorities creating RAPEX<sup>1</sup> notifications have as complete and accurate information as possible in order to better identify dangerous products on the market. This will help other Member States take action against such dangerous products, including removing them from the market if necessary.

### **What does “traceability” mean in the context of consumer products?**

Traceability refers to the origin of materials and parts, processing history and the distribution and location of the product after delivery. In the context of consumer safety, traceability serves to identify both economic operators and physical products in the entire supply chain. With this information, corrective measures, such as product recalls or withdrawals, can be effectively put in place.

### **Which products are addressed by the report?**

The report addresses non-food, non-healthcare products in the scope of the current EU General Product Safety Directive (GPSD), including childcare products, clothing, textile and fashion items, furniture, decorations, kitchen and cooking accessories, lighting equipment, jewelry and others. These categories of products currently don't have any clear, legal traceability requirements, however, new requirements are being discussed as future EU product safety regulation will replace

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<sup>1</sup> RAPEX is the EU Rapid Alert System for non-food dangerous products  
([http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/rapex/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/rapex/index_en.htm))



the GPSD. Harmonised product sectors – products with existing regulations such as toys and cosmetics - may find value in the report, but all recommendations and best practices highlighted in the report cannot overrule any existing legislative requirement.

### **What are the group's recommendations in summary?**

The group's recommendations address economic operators, regulators/market surveillance authorities and consumers.

- **For economic operators**, the group recommends labeling consumer products with product identification codes and automating traceability systems using global standards such as ISO and GS1 Standards for product identification, data capture and exchange in order to strengthen consumer safety and improve traceability between trading partners across multiple countries.
- **For market surveillance and other authorities**, the group recommends including the use of barcodes in training and, conducting traceability assessments in cooperation with private actors as well as developing best practices to collect information about dangerous products when they cross EU borders.
- **For consumers**, the group suggests raising more awareness on the importance of product identification and helping consumers alert authorities about suspicious or potentially dangerous products.

### **What do these recommendations mean for the industry?**

With the likelihood of impending new regulations for certain non-food, non-healthcare products, the best practices outlined in the group's report can help industries proactively prepare for these traceability requirements. From a business stance, acting on these recommendations will help trading partners enhance efficiencies, reduce costs and build consumer trust in their brands.

### **What was the role GS1 played in the information expert group?**

GS1 was selected as one of the 15 traceability experts appointed to the group. In addition, the organisation was appointed as a neutral research facilitator to understand the needs and issues of all stakeholders, including companies, authorities and consumers, and to facilitate an open dialogue for finding solutions together.

### **How can GS1 Standards help improve traceability and adhere to new regulations around traceability?**

GS1 Standards are used around the world to identify products and capture, record and share data about these products. This information is key in laying the groundwork for traceability. Reliable data cannot exist if traceability systems are not automated. These automated systems rely on a common



language of standards (such as GS1 Standards) in order to “talk” to each other when capturing and sharing data.

### **Why might we see new regulations now, and not before?**

An outbreak of wide-scale recalls and an increase in complaints about product safety as well as the lack of harmonisation of certain products in trading processes has likely led European authorities to more closely address certain products without any current traceability regulatory requirement. New regulations are perhaps also meant to parallel those in the food industry that protect consumers and encourage a safer supply chain.

### **What are the benefits of addressing the report’s recommendations and how will this impact business?**

The main benefits for businesses that choose to automate their traceability systems using global standards are improved quality management and recall readiness as well as better logistics performance. Taking a proactive stance toward improving traceability will prevent costs and encourage more effective collaboration between stakeholders, including trading partners and authorities.

### **How do consumers benefit from improved product traceability?**

In the event of a safety issue or recall, dangerous products can be properly identified and removed from the market faster. In addition, efficient, standards-based traceability systems improve the accuracy of product information and labels.