

You would expect well known tool hire firms to work to the highest safety standards, but a new Which? probe has found that some of them are hiring out tools that could injure you



Big name hire firms including Jewson and Hire Station (through Homebase) have removed tools we tested from their shelves after a Which? investigation revealed safety faults with some of their tools.

Half of the 26 tools we hired from major companies failed safety tests in our lab. The faults that we uncovered included:

- unearthed plugs
- worn and broken blades
- kitchen foil used as a fuse
- damaged wires

These could expose the user to an increased risk of starting a fire, being cut, scalded by leaking steam or receiving an electric shock.

When we confronted the companies with our findings, most agreed to remove the tools we'd hired from the shelves to investigate further. Jewson and Hire Station (Homebase) also agreed to tighten their safety procedures. We reported those whose products concerned us most to trading standards officers.

For our investigation, we hired wallpaper strippers, circular saws, tile cutters and hedge trimmers. Many of these will be hired by consumers for DIY projects this Easter.

We're concerned that hire shops are not consistently checking tools – if the shops we visited had carried out basic checks, they would never have hired out half of these tools. The firms that hired us faulty tools are shown opposite and over the page. We've listed them in order of size with the biggest first.

The exception in our probe was HSS (see p62). We hired four tools from HSS and found no safety issues. However, although HSS says it's standard policy for its customers to be asked if they require any safety equipment, this happened on only two of our four visits.

OUR INVESTIGATION

We hired 26 tools from separate branches of Brandon Hire, HSS, Jewson, Speedy, Travis Perkins as well as four independent hire shops. We also used Homebase's telephone hire service to order four tools from its partner company, Hire Station.

The tools were tested in an independent laboratory for electrical and mechanical safety defects in accordance with the relevant British Standards and guidelines from The Institution of Engineering and Technology.

We also recorded whether we were offered safety equipment. This includes personal protective equipment such as goggles, gloves and ear protectors as well as residual current devices (RCDs) or circuit breakers.



LOOKING FOR A BEST BUY CHAINSAW? We have reviews of nine chainsaws under £100, including models from brands such as Bosch and Black and Decker. See www.which.co.uk/chainsaws for more information.

SPEEDY

TOOLS WITH FAULTS 3/3

TOOLS The wallpaper stripper we hired had a split hose which meant it could leak hot steam onto the user when it was filled with water.

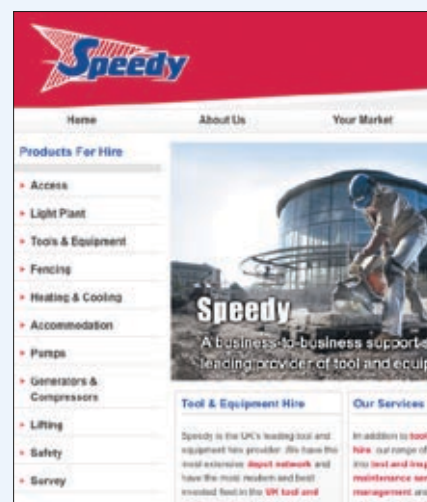
The circular saw we hired didn't have a riving knife. This should sit behind the saw blade to guide it and prevent it from snagging. If the riving knife is missing,

the main saw blade could snag in the wood and jump up at you.

The tile cutter we hired from Speedy refused to switch on when we got it home. While there was no safety issue with the cutter, it seems unlikely that anyone at the depot had checked whether it was working properly since it had last been hired out.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT None offered. We were offered an RCD on one occasion.

SPEEDY TOLD WHICH? 'At this stage it is too soon to verify the accuracy of the statement. This equipment has been taken out of circulation and will be tested and inspected. A full range of safety equipment is available at all of our depots and our policy is to offer it – we are retraining and coaching our people'



JEWSON

TOOLS WITH FAULTS 2/4

TOOLS The transformer for the tile cutter had a loose earth screw. This increases the risk of electric shock – if there was a fault, the fuse might not blow. The cable had a cut that left only basic insulation to protect against shock.

The circuit breaker we got with the wallpaper stripper had stray live wires near the

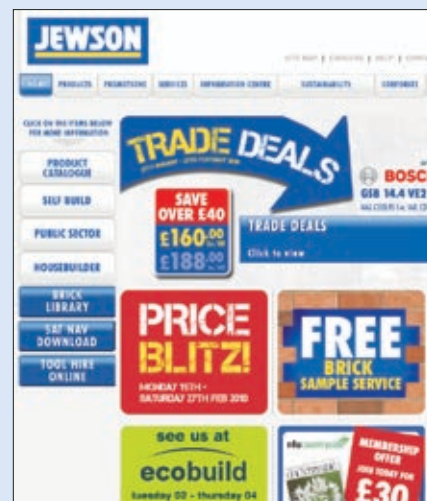
earth screw. If these get too close, the risk of shock increases as the plug is not properly earthed. The badly fitting fuse increased fire risk.



This split cable increased the risk of shock

SAFETY EQUIPMENT None offered. We were offered RCDs on two occasions.

JEWSON SAID 'There was a failure to comply with the correct standards and we are putting measures in place to avoid any recurrence of this in the future, including staff recording that safety checks are carried out. All customers should be offered safety equipment; we are reminding staff of the importance of this.'



BRANDON HIRE

TOOLS WITH FAULTS 3/3

TOOLS The circular saw we hired had a wobbly blade – these saws ought to cut smoothly and easily. This fault could be dangerous if you had to use force to cut through wood, as the blade could snag and jump back.

The hedge trimmer's extension lead had a cut in the cable that left only the

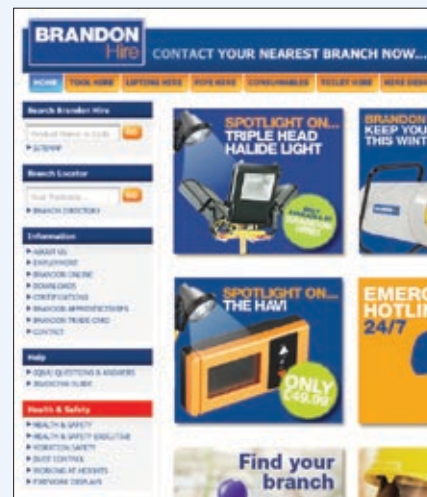
basic insulation to protect our tester against the risk of an electric shock.

The wallpaper stripper we hired from Brandon leaked water everywhere which not only meant it was unusable but could have soaked the carpet in a customer's home.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT Brandon offered us safety equipment, such as gloves and goggles,

on two of our store visits but only an RCD on the third.

BRANDON HIRE SAID 'Our investigation found that the hedge trimmer does have a nick in the extension cable but the basic insulation is intact. We found a small leak with the wallpaper stripper and while there was some movement with the saw blade there was no safety issue. Our record shows that you were offered protective equipment on all three occasions.'



TRAVIS PERKINS

TOOLS WITH FAULTS 2/4

TOOLS The petrol hedge trimmer had a broken blade extension. These blade extensions reduce the risk of injury if the blade brushes against you.

The water bath plug was missing from our tile cutter. Without water you're likely to generate more dust and tile fragments. It's an

annoying fault, but unlikely to be dangerous.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT Offered once out of four times.

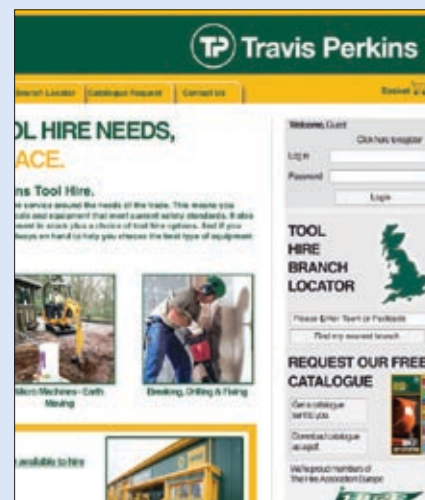
TRAVIS PERKINS SAID

'The two tips of the blade extension are broken but they are level with the blade so are not a safety threat. We are disappointed to find that the water plug was

missing and it shouldn't have been hired out. However, the tool can be used for dry cutting as well as wet cutting. We have robust systems in place to ensure tools are checked before hire.'



Hedge trimmer: broken blade extensions



HIRE STATION

Hired through Homebase

TOOLS WITH FAULTS 2/4

TOOLS The fuse on the tile cutter's transformer was wrapped in foil that kept the



The plug had a fuse wrapped in foil

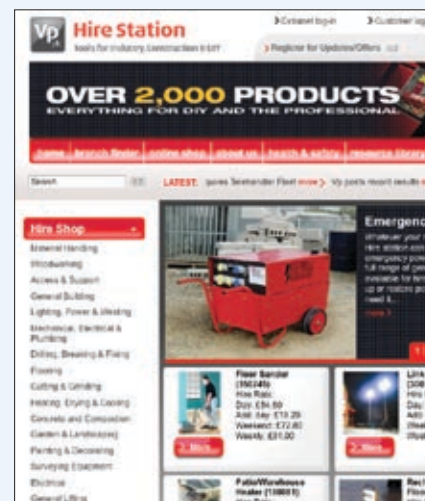
current flowing even though the fuse had blown. This increases the risk of fire.

The circular saw's blade was very worn. This could be dangerous if you used force to cut through wood, as the blade could catch and jump back at you.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT We were offered safety equipment twice. Once, we were offered

none, but the paperwork said we'd refused it.

HIRE STATION SAID 'The fuse was a breach of our policy and we are ensuring that all branches follow procedures fully. The saw case is more subjective as it's impossible to guarantee new blades. We are introducing a system to ensure blades are fit for purpose. We are disappointed that your shoppers claim they were not offered the equipment required.'



INDEPENDENT'S

TOOLS WITH FAULTS 2/4

TOOLS One independent shop we visited hired out a circular saw without a riving knife. This sits behind the blade to help guide it and prevent it snagging as you saw. If this is missing the blade could snag and kick back at you.

Another independent hire shop hired out a tile cutter

without a 'grippy' surface. This means the cutter will vibrate more and it'll be harder to cut with – this is annoying though unlikely to be dangerous.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

None of the four independents offered us safety equipment to go with the tools we hired from them.

HSS HIRE

TOOLS WITH FAULTS 0/4

TOOLS We hired four tools and found no safety issues.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT We were offered safety advice twice.

HSS SAID 'We take safety very seriously... It is standard policy for our customers to be asked if they require any safety equipment.'

