

80pc of plugs sold in HK 'dangerous'

By STEVE BALL

MORE than 80 per cent of the electric plugs sold in Hong Kong are defective and potentially dangerous, the Consumer Council warned yesterday.

Some designs are so bad a person could be electrocuted plugging them into the wall; other plugs simply fall apart.

Tests on 22 brands sold in supermarkets and department stores revealed only four were up to international standards.

A careless person could easily get a lethal electric shock using five of the brands because the metal plug pins were too close to the edge of the plug.

The plastic casing on three other brands cracked after they had been used less than 1,000 times – well within a plug's normal usage.

And one brand was so bad it had both faults.

The council renewed its call for strict safety stan-

dards for all electrical appliances, for sub-standard goods to be banned and for anyone selling them to be fined heavily.

Its chief research and testing officer, Connie Lau Yin-hing, said: "We feel very frustrated because we have been doing these tests for 15 years and yet nothing has improved.

"These results are actually not so bad. Earlier this year we tested electric extension reels and found 100 per cent failed."

The Government's Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) immediately announced it would try to bring in new regulations as soon as possible.

EMSD deputy director John Collier said he was hoping rules on plugs and other electric accessories might be ready by next summer.

"Bringing the electrical system in Hong Kong up to standard has been a mam-

moth undertaking. We have had to devise standards for, and register, thousands of electrical contractors.

"Our priority has been to try and improve standards in the premises where appliances might be used. We have to make the best use of the resources we have available."

The Health Department said last year 12 people were killed by electric shocks – down from 13 the year before. It was unclear whether any of these deaths were caused by faulty plugs.

Figures from the Fire Services Department show that last year 1,610 fires were caused by some kind of electrical fault – rising to 890 fires in the first half of this year.

The department is so concerned by the increase it has targeted electrical safety for its fire prevention campaign next month.

Full results of the survey are contained in the latest issue of the council's *Choice* magazine.