



Display Supply & Lighting, Inc.



Safety in Lighting and Electrical Components

We all know the importance of safety and its role on the show floor. Despite this, repeatedly, we see some companies selling, importing and using products that are not listed to Underwriters Laboratories (UL) standards, whether it is lighting or other equipment. Why should we care? Rob Cohen, vice president of sales and product development, Display Supply & Lighting Inc., explains what is meant when a product is “listed to UL standards” and why exhibitors should consider its significance.

What is UL, ETL and CSA? What are the differences?

UL is an independent, not-for-profit product safety testing and certification organization that writes, maintains and updates applicable safety standards for lighting and other products. ETL, CSA and UL are all Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratories (NRTLs) that test products to determine if they meet the applicable UL standards.

What does it mean for a product to be LISTED to UL standards?

A product that has the listing mark of UL, ETL or CSA means that the entire product and all of its components have been tested as they are used in connection with one another. This means that the entire product meets the applicable UL standard - not just one or some of the components (like the power supply or electrical cord).

Testing is completely documented in a testing report. The components used are listed in the report and are essentially registered for the applicable product. Assembly factories are subject to unannounced inspections to assure ongoing compliance with the testing reports.

What if a company says that it is using UL recognized components?

UL recognized components means that some (or all) of the components manufactured in the making of the product meet applicable UL standard. What it does not tell us is if the complete product is safe when all of those components are used together, which is substantially different.

What is the difference between the ETL, CSA and UL Marks?

Each is a separate testing organization, and certification marks –ETL, CSA or UL Listed Mark – demonstrate compliance to widely accepted product safety standards. All three are recognized as NRTLs in the U.S. and, in a similar capacity, as a testing organization and certifying body in Canada by the Standards Council of Canada. Interestingly, Canada has legislation requiring products being sold to be listed to the UL standards.

Why do some products have the ETL or CSA marks and others have the UL Mark?

All three organizations test to the exact same standard. One of the key decisions in choosing whom to use is that testing through ETL or CSA for potential listing tends to be faster than UL's timeframe. Quite simply, the quicker one can complete testing, the sooner they can bring a recognized and listed product to market.

Why should I really care if a product is listed with UL, ETL or CSA?

Using products that are proven to be safe when used as intended would be important not just for the safety of our own customers, but for the safety of all of those participating in an event. Secondly, comes the concern of liability. If damage occurs from the use of a product that is not listed with UL, ETL or CSA, there is a significantly higher degree of negligence and potential liability.

How do I make sure that I am using ETL, CSA or UL listed and approved products?

You can do any one or all of the following:

1. Ask your vendor if the complete product being purchased is listed with either ETL, CSA or UL; and/or
2. Examine the product for a label showing compliance with ETL, UL or CSA; and/or
3. Ask for a copy of the Authorization to Mark document issued by the testing authority associated with the particular product.