

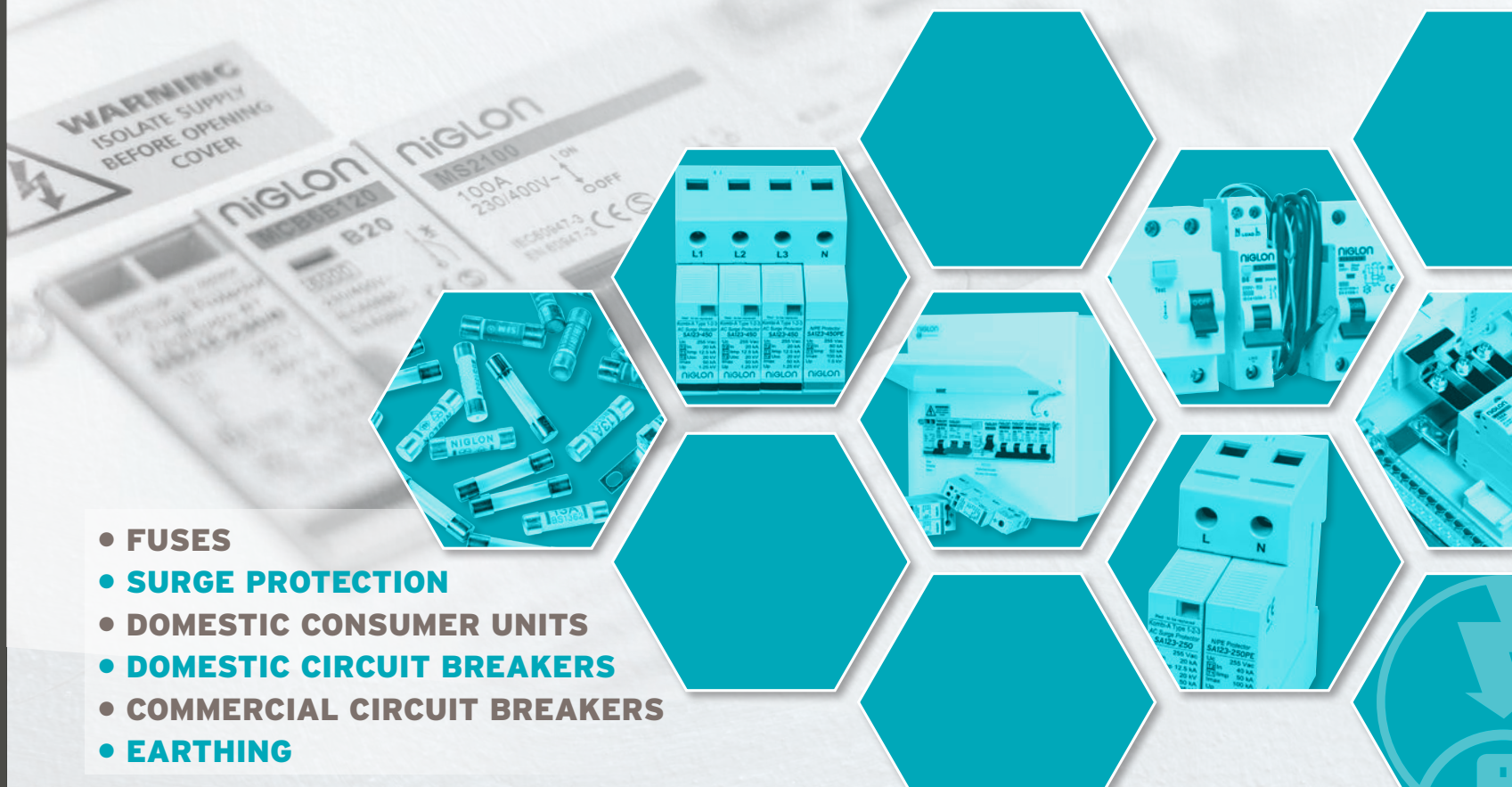
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A NEW YEAR FULL OF CHANGES

As we bid farewell to 2021 and welcome in 2022, there are plenty of challenges facing the electrical industry – and the world in general.

Yet there are many things to be hopeful about, and Niglon is concentrating on the year ahead, ensuring the company is best placed to continue providing the industry with quality circuit protection, control and automation, wiring accessories, and thousands of products vital to installations across the UK.

As well as wishing you all a Happy New Year, Niglon would like to use this opportunity to share its insights into the current supply and stock issues facing the industry – and how it has been working to mitigate the impact upon its customers.

Taking stock of global manufacturing and supply issues

Decisions about stock levels have always been a balancing act – running out of stock is a worry, but so too is having excess stock you can't sell. In Niglon's case, the company felt it was the right decision to up its reserves by 30% a while ago and has pledged to keep them at this higher level going forward.

The company had sound business reasons for doing so, but even Niglon couldn't have predicted the stock and supply issues which would begin plaguing the world – meaning the 'just-in-time' approach of only ordering stock when needed became even less desirable.

A core problem is the electricity restrictions being faced by Chinese factories – caused by limits on producing electricity using coal within the country itself, and rising coal costs across the world which are preventing them from importing more.

Two thirds of factories are being closed down for hours or days at a time – and the knock-on effect in terms of product shortages is being felt worldwide. With workers set to travel away from industrial areas to visit their families over the Chinese New Year (1-11 February), it's an annual occurrence that a proportion of the workforce won't return, further diminishing factory output for the foreseeable future.

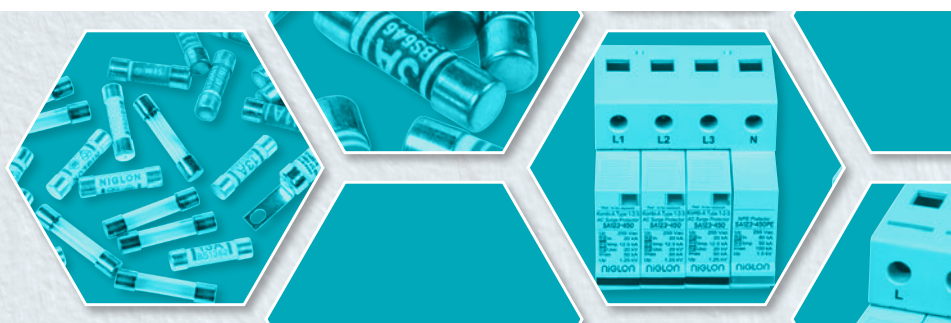
Trouble at sea

In addition to problems manufacturing stock, shipping it across the world has also become a problem – with more than three quarters of ports experiencing abnormally long turnaround times, according to analysis by RBC Capital Markets.

Add to this at least a 400% increase in shipping containers in the past year, an almost doubling of door-to-door shipping times, and the HGV driver shortage – particularly impacting the UK in the wake of Brexit – and it all makes for rather grim reading.

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Act now

While an unlucky combination of factors has come together to create the perfect storm (or perfect headache) for manufacturers and suppliers, there is hope that we can emerge from that storm. And it feels likely that 'just-in-time' may be replaced with a preference for larger stock reserves across the electrical sector and beyond.

Niglon's decision to increase stock reserves by 30% has stood the company in good stead so far, and looks likely to carry it through the rest of the storm. That's why Niglon is encouraging everyone in the supply chain to ensure they are prepared for the next few months, especially contractors who should be having conversations with their wholesalers, to question how much stock is available and what plans have been made to overcome supply issues.

Crucial that these conversations take place now, otherwise there is no guarantee that contractors will be able to continue purchasing the products they need for their installations during this time.

And this isn't just a case of getting through until 'normality' resumes. The situation should act as a wake-up call to everyone in the electrical industry that we need to keep preparing for the worst. That's not pessimistic – it's simply a more sensible way to run a business than adopting the 'just-in-time' approach.

Changes ahead

While it's not certain that the global manufacturing and shipping problems will change for a while yet, one thing we know is set to happen soon is the finalisation of the second amendments to the 18th Edition wiring regulations.

While the industry prepares for confirmation of the changes, the Niglon team has been working hard to ensure it is ready for what's to come, based on the previous circulation of the draft amendments.

The company has been developing a range of Arc Fault Detection Devices (AFDDs) to ensure its customers have a quality product to choose from before the changes come into effect.

While Niglon hasn't yet seen the final amendments, it's expected under regulation 421.1.7 that it will become a requirement – rather than a recommendation – to use an AFDD for circuits' supply socket outlets and fixed current using equipment (where the current doesn't exceed 32A).

Where an AFDD is installed, it will detect arcs caused by cable defects, loose connections or other problems and will trip accordingly.

After an extensive design and testing period, Niglon's single module AFDD is set to launch soon.

Switch complete

When the proposed amendments to the 18th Edition regulations were circulated, Niglon took immediate heed of the changes suggested for 531.3.3, namely that A Type RCDs must be used for all installation where there is a DC pulsated residual current, because of the detection and prevention against electric shock they offer.

This differs from the original regulations in that AC Types could be used for 'standard' installations (with no firm definition of what was meant by 'standard').

At Niglon, rather than wait for the amendments to take effect before it took action, the company wanted to ensure that it (and consequently its customers) were fully ready – so began switching production to solely A Type RCDs and stopped making AC Types.

Now, with the finalised second amendments expected to be published this spring before taking effect next year, that switch is complete – meaning Niglon (and its customers) are well ahead of time for new regulation compliance!




In with the new

Niglon is well and truly looking ahead to the future, which will include the launch of new products in 2022. As with the company's entire existing catalogue of more than 4,500 products, its Switched Neutral RCBOs will help contractors complete their installations even more quickly and simply – knowing they've used quality products, made to last.

In addition to the current RCBO range, the new Switched Neutral option means whenever there is a fault with an appliance or component, both the live and neutral automatically switch off to isolate the power supply.

Another benefit is when the contractor has finished installing the product and is ready to complete their insulation resistance test, there's no need to disconnect as there won't be a false reading shown, as can happen with a standard RCBO if it's not disconnected before the test.

Do keep your eyes peeled, as the Switched Neutral RCBO won't be the only new Niglon product launched in 2022. Visit the company's website to see the existing range of more than 4,500 products across circuit protection, wiring accessories, installation essentials, industrial accessories, cable management, lighting control, fixings and tools, and control and automation. 

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EDUCATION MESSAGE NEEDS TO GO VIRAL

Paul Dawson, Commercial Director at **Niglon** asks, what does the phrase 'antiviral' mean to you?



Did you realise there are materials being marketed as antiviral which are actually effective only against a type of virus which isn't necessarily harmful to humans? Or that 'kill rates' of different viruses can vary significantly, even when placed on the exact same product surface?

The team at Niglon wasn't prepared to take the 'antiviral' messaging at face value, and that's why the company engaged with leading experts from the University of Manchester to further its knowledge about how viruses act on surfaces. The team also commissioned testing on its own products as well as other manufacturers' within the market – to educate itself and like-minded customers.

Niglon needed to explore whether individuals are being misled and potentially put at risk, because the company sensed the 'antiviral' message some companies promote didn't perfectly reflect the scientific reality.

Concerning results

What's clear is that contractors who've installed 'antiviral' products to keep their customers safe, may not have been provided with sufficient detail by manufacturers to enable them to make informed purchasing decisions.

It would be reasonable for any of us to think you can't pick up any type of virus from touching an 'antiviral' switch plate – or at least that the chance of contracting COVID-19 or any other virus would be significantly reduced. In reality, the situation is far more nuanced, and what appears to be going on is an unfortunate example of certain businesses trying to extract value from a terrible situation without giving all the information necessary to keep their customers safe.

Or maybe some manufacturers don't even know the science themselves...

Where's your proof?

Through Niglon's research and expert consultations, the company has learned there are different types of viruses (enveloped and non-enveloped), those that use human cells as their host and those that affect bacteria.

The ones that use bacteria as their hosts are known as bacteriophages, or phages, and they actually live harmlessly within most of our guts. In fact, there are trials across the world where they're being used to target drug-resistant bacteria as an alternative to antibiotics – showing they're not only harmless to humans, but in some cases can actually be beneficial!

ISO21702:2019 is the standard recognised for testing antiviral efficacy on non-porous products, like electric light switches and socket plates. This testing regime allows for substitute viruses like phages to be used (perfectly legitimately, the company adds), instead of the really harmful viruses, which can spread easily.

But test results showed a notable difference in the rate at which a virus is neutralised from a surface (the aforementioned 'kill rate') depending whether a phage or mammalian virus (which impacts us humans) was used.

Some products may significantly reduce the transmission of a phage but not a mammalian virus. So, they're 'antiviral' when it comes to phage, but not when it comes to viruses that impact mammals. Technically then these products may be legitimately described as antiviral, even though they won't stop coronavirus or other 'human' viruses?

Another key point to make from Niglon's research is that there is no silver bullet when it comes to antiviral efficacy. One virus can be affected very differently to the next, and the contact time (how long the test was conducted over) also differs from test to test. The company believes that all antiviral claims should be accompanied by specifics; which particular virus strains have been tested, on what product, for how long, and under what test conditions. Nothing less than total transparency will do, especially when it's people's health at stake.

What does this mean for us?

Niglon says that it is categorically not going to state its products are 'antiviral' until it is truly confident that they actively reduce transmission of certain viruses that cause illness to human beings. This is what it believes its customers would understand from the term, and the action they would expect any responsible and trustworthy company to take.


Niglon is continuing its investigative work focused on potential modifications to materials or coatings, which could lead to that outcome, so it may be something it is able to bring to the industry in the near future. And the company says that when it gets to that point, it will be sure to include all the specifics, because anything less would not be acceptable.

What does this mean for you?

If you're considering installing a product based on the claim it is 'antiviral' then Paul strongly encourages you to do some research into exactly what this means. Ask as many questions as you need.

And if the manufacturer is unable or unwilling to back up its claims, consider just how honest and open it is being in using the 'antiviral' label.

Because it's also all too easy and (commercially speaking) tempting for many companies right now, to use the word 'antiviral' within their advertising campaigns and product promotions, for the wrong reasons. And contractors are at real risk of being taken advantage of through a lack of openness and the limited dissemination of knowledge on the subject at this time.

Niglon has produced a free guide based on its research and testing to help explain some of the key terms around the subject and share its knowledge. The guide will be available at www.niglon.co.uk/news/antiviral. 

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