Consumer Federation of America

The Consumer Product Incident Database—Saferproducts.gov

The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, signed into law in August of 2008, strengthened the authority of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CSPC), the federal agency that oversees the safety of consumer products. The law includes many vital improvements to our safety net including lowering lead limits, issuing strong mandatory standards for infant and durable products and requiring third party testing of children's products. The law also directed the CPSC to create a database—Saferproducts.gov where consumers can report and research safety hazards experienced with a wide variety of consumer products.

Before the CPSIA passed:

- While the CPSC has historically collected consumer complaints, most were hidden from the public for sometimes long periods of time until a recall was announced. This meant that too often, consumers were unwittingly using products that CPSC and manufacturers knew posed safety hazards.
- Section 6(b) of the Consumer Product Safety Act causes this lack of transparency because it requires CPSC to essentially ask permission from manufacturers before it can communicate information about a product to the public.
- Before the CPSIA passed, consumers were only able to find recall information about particular products. No product specific information was otherwise available to consumers.
- While 6(b) still exists, Saferproducts.gov is outside of the scope of section 6(b).

CPSIA's creation of Saferproducts.gov:

- Saferproducts.gov went live on March 11, 2011.
- The database helps the CPSC to identify trends in product hazards much more quickly and efficiently.
- Consumers can submit reports about a harm or risk of harm associated with a consumer product to the database, either online, by telephone, or by mail.
- Consumers can also search the database for product hazard reports.
- Manufacturers can provide comments to these reports.
- The CPSC database contains an array of protections to ensure that inaccurate information does not get published: anonymous reports are not permitted; only *safety-related* information about a harm or risk of harm is permitted; reports are only considered for publication if 8 specific minimum fields are completed; and manufacturers have the opportunity to correct inaccurate information and to provide their own comments.

Saferproduct.gov has already proven to be a useful tool for consumers:

- Consumers can search the database to see if other consumers have experienced hazards with a product.
- If consumers experienced a risk of harm or an actual injury caused by a consumer product, consumers can now quickly and easily share that experience with the CPSC.
- Based on a study by CFA and KID, released in April, 2012:[1]
    - In the first 10 months, 6,080 reports were filed.
    - Consumers made up 97% of the reporters to the database
    - 70% involved products purchased in the last five years, not older products.
    - Manufacturers exercised their right to post additional comments on 53% of reports.
    - The information provided to the database is overwhelmingly specific with 84% of all reports including a serial number or model name or number.
- Approximately 15,517 reports have been posted on saferproducts.gov.[2]
- CPSC hopes to spot emerging trends in product hazards in the future, using Saferproducts.gov.
- CPSC will work with manufacturers to address product hazards earlier and more expeditiously.
- Deloitte conducted an analysis of the data from saferproducts.gov[3] in early 2013 and found that saferproducts.gov:
    - provides "a learning opportunity for manufacturers in their attempt to bring safe products to the market place and allow[s] them to gain a better understanding of consumer behavior in regard to their interaction with products."[4]
    - identified that kitchen products and appliances in particular, make up the largest percent of reports on saferproducts.gov.[5]
- The Government Accountability Office (GAO) found, in a report, *Awareness, Use and Usefulness of Saferproducts.gov*, released in March 2013 that:
    - "[m]any consumers in GAO's usability tests thought the sight generally was easy to use and had helpful information, but identified areas for improvement"[6] as well.

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[1] http://www.consumerfed.org/pdfs/CPSCDatabase1YearAnniversary3-29-12.pdf
[2] As of July 25, 2013.
[3] http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/AERS/us_aers_foct_FPS_saferproductsgov_03082013.pdf
[4] http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-UnitedStates/Local%20Assets/Documents/AERS/us_aers_foct_FPS_saferproductsgov_03082013.pdf, page 1.
[5] Deloitte found that reports of kitchen products accounted for 39% of total reports on saferproducts.gov.
[6] http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/652916.pdf at 22.