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Opinion: Overlooking recalls could put you in danger

By Eric Chaffin
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This image provided by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission shows an example of a Medical King Bed Assist Rail, one of the adult bed rails being recalled Thursday, Nov. 14, 2024, due to a risk of death by asphyxiation. Rushing, Hannah/Associated Press



This photo provided by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission shows an example of a Rest 1st Generation Sound Machine sold with a power adapter being recalled Wednesday, July 3, 2024. Hatch Baby is recalling nearly 1 million adapters due to shock hazard. Associated Press

A Colorado woman was using her 6-quart crockpot when the lid exploded. Scalding hot contents severely burned her chest, breasts, and abdomen (Rivera v. Sunbeam Products, Inc., 2023). Unbeknownst to her, the manufacturer recalled that same crockpot three years before because it posed a burn risk to consumers.

Between 2009 and 2019, more than 30 babies died in Fisher-Price Rock 'n Play Sleepers. In April 2019, the company recalled all of them. Four years later, the manufacturer announced the recall again because at least eight more deaths were reported to have occurred after the initial announcement.

These are two examples of how product recalls can be ineffective. There are many more examples. Recalled products can harm consumers. How can you protect yourself and your family?

Consumer products may not be as safe as you think

According to the public interest research group U.S. PIRG Education Fund, in 2023, U.S. product recalls reached a seven-year high. That year, companies initiated about 321 new recalls of products connected to more than 550 injuries, 15 deaths, and over 500 fires.

We hear about recalls almost daily. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and media try to keep us informed, but they are often ineffective because no notice is given directly to consumers who purchased the products, despite companies tracking buyer behavior.

We don't expect issues with the products we use. We trust that companies test products adequately and regulators ensure their safety.

According to the safety commission, only a small number of consumer products must comply with specific safety standards before being launched — and even then, the tests may only evaluate part of a product. As for the rest, we must rely on the companies themselves to do safety testing, monitor their use in the public and take action to correct dangerous conditions identified during testing and use.

Couple's hopes for baby dashed by defective product

Another example.

A Florida couple was caught off-guard by a defective product. They wanted to expand their family through in-vitro fertilization (IVF), so they purchased 10 eggs from a donor to be developed into viable embryos.

In December 2023, their fertility clinic successfully fertilized nine of the eggs and placed them in a CooperSurgical LifeGlobal culture media, designed to nurture the embryos until they were ready to be implanted into the mother's uterus.

All the embryos were damaged and destroyed, devastating the couple's dreams.

This was a shock to the family and the fertility clinic. Only after several fertility clinics complained did the Connecticut-based company, CooperSurgical, issue a recall of three lots of its alleged defective culture media, citing manufacturing errors. The company now faces numerous lawsuits filed by hopeful parents who

suffered heartbreaking losses because of the company's lack of quality assurance and quality control.

How consumers can protect themselves

It is easy to check to make sure your product is safe. Go to the safety commission's website to search for recalls. You can also check the [SaferProducts.gov](https://www.saferproducts.gov) site to review any consumer complaints about a particular product.

To check recalls for non-consumer products — such as those involving food, medicine, and vehicles — go to www.recalls.gov.

Another tip: Be cautious about buying products from resale websites. They're not supposed to sell recalled products, but sometimes do. Be careful about buying products shipped from overseas, as international sellers may not comply with U.S. safety standards.

If you or a loved one has been injured by a defective product, it makes sense to consult with an attorney experienced in handling claims of this type.

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