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REMARKS  
BY  
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TO  
FIRE RETARDANT CHEMICAL ASSOCIATION  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
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MY FATHER, WHO HAD A RETAIL STORE FOR OVER  
40 YEARS, LOVED TELLING BORSCHT BELT STORIES  
ABOUT TALKING ANIMALS.

HERE'S ONE OF HIS FAVORITES.

A HORSE WALKS UP TO CASEY STENGEL (THAT  
SHOWS YOU HOW LONG AGO THIS WAS). SAYS,  
"HELLO."

STENGEL SAYS, "AMAZING! A TALKING HORSE."

THE HORSE SAYS, "NOT ONLY CAN I TALK. I'M THE  
BEST HITTER IN THE WORLD."

SO CASEY BRINGS THE HORSE INTO YANKEE STADIUM, BRINGS HIM TO THE PLATE DURING BATTING PRACTICE AND BRINGS OUT WHITEY FORD TO PITCH.

THE HORSE KNOCKS EVERY PITCH INTO THE STANDS OR OUT OF THE PARK.

CASEY SAYS, "FANTASTIC! YOU'RE IN THE LINEUP TODAY -- AND HITTING CLEANUP."

IN THE FIRST INNING, THE YANKEES LOAD THE BASES. UP COMES THE HORSE. HITS THE FIRST PITCH 500 FEET INTO THE BLEACHERS.

AND JUST STANDS AT HOME PLATE. STANDS THERE!

THE RUNNERS ARE ROUNDING THE BASES. STENGEL'S YELLING AT THE HORSE. "RUN! RUN! RUN!"

THE HORSE LOOKS AT HIM. "RUN? IF I COULD RUN -  
- I'D BE AT HIALEAH!"

THERE'S A MORAL TO THAT STORY. IT'S THIS. YOU HAVE TO KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS.

I TRY TO KNOW MY LIMITATIONS.  
YOU WON'T HEAR A LOT OF HIGH-FLOWN  
RHETORIC FROM ME, TODAY. I'M NOT COMFORTABLE  
WITH IT.

YOU WILL HEAR CONCRETE DETAILS ABOUT THE  
WORK THE CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION  
HAS BEEN DOING SINCE I TOOK OFFICE IN 1994 .

OF COURSE, I'LL TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE  
OF FIRE-RETARDANT CHEMICALS.

(PAUSE)

YOU KNOW, AMERICANS MAY BE CYNICAL ABOUT  
GOVERNMENT.

BUT THEY ARE NOT CYNICAL ABOUT SAFETY.

IN A 1999 HARRIS POLL ABOUT FEDERAL SAFETY  
REGULATIONS, WHEN ASKED ABOUT STRICT RULES  
ABOUT PRODUCT SAFETY, FOOD, AIRLINES AND  
HIGHWAY SAFETY, 93% RATED FEDERAL  
INVOLVEMENT AS "IMPORTANT."

WE KNOW OUR WORK IS IMPORTANT -- AND WE  
KNOW THERE'S A LOT LEFT TO ACCOMPLISH.

CPSC OVERSEES ABOUT 15,000 TYPES OF  
PRODUCTS THAT ADD PLEASURE TO LIFE FOR MOST  
BUT CAN POSE DANGER TO SOME.

IN FACT, EACH YEAR THERE ARE OVER 29 MILLION  
INJURIES -- AND ABOUT 22,000 DEATHS RELATED TO  
THESE CONSUMER PRODUCTS.

WE WORRY ABOUT DEATHS AND INJURIES 365  
DAYS OF THE YEAR.

AND THERE IS A SOLID DIFFERENCE SINCE WE  
CAME IN IN 1994.

YOU CAN SEE THE DIFFERENCE WHEN IT COMES  
TO CIVIL PENALTIES.

IN 1999 WE ASSESSED MORE THAN TEN TIMES THE  
AMOUNT OF PENALTIES THAN WERE ASSESSED IN 1989.

WE'VE IMPROVED OUR TOLL-FREE HOTLINE.  
WHEN I CAME THERE WERE EIGHT LINES. NOW WE  
HAVE 96.

A RESPONSE TO A COMPLAINT USED TO TAKE AS  
MUCH AS 48 DAYS. NOW IT TAKES 48 HOURS.

ANOTHER DIFFERENCE? THE NUMBER OF  
RECALLS.

IN 1987, THE CPSC ISSUED 136 RECALLS.

IN THE YEAR AFTER I TOOK OVER, WE DID MORE  
THAN THREE TIMES AS MANY - FOUR HUNDRED AND  
FORTY.

AND WE DO THE RECALLS DIFFERENTLY.

OUR PREDECESSORS USED TO DO WHAT I CALL  
THE PAPER AIRPLANE APPROACH -- SAIL A LITTLE  
PRESS RELEASE OUT THE WINDOW HOPING IT HITS  
SOMEONE ON THE HEAD BELOW.

THEY HAD ONE FAX LINE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

WE DO OUR BEST TO GET ATTENTION FOR OUR  
RECALLS -- ON TV, RADIO, FEATURES IN NEWSPAPERS.

OTHER AGENCIES DREAD IT WHEN THEY HEAR  
REPORTERS WANT TO DO A STORY ON THEM.

WE LOVE IT.

WE ADMIRE WHAT THE MORNING SHOWS HAVE  
DONE FOR CONSUMERS.

IN FACT, THE ONE QUESTION I AM ASKED MORE  
THAN ANY OTHER -- WHAT'S KATIE COURIC REALLY  
LIKE?

WE HAVE BEGUN A NEW PROJECT AT CPSC THAT  
MAY BE OF INTEREST TO YOU AS CONSUMER PRODUCT  
PRODUCERS.

RECENTLY, WE BEGAN TO GET INCREASING  
REPORTS THAT PEOPLE WERE SELLING UNSAFE GOODS  
OVER THE INTERNET.

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE MANUFACTURERS WHO THINK THAT SINCE STORES WON'T CARRY ILLEGAL MERCHANDISE, THEY CAN GO AFTER CONSUMERS ON THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY.

OUR MESSAGE TO THEM IS: "NO, YOU CAN'T."

WE ARE GOING AFTER THEM.

IN DECEMBER OF LAST YEAR, WE ANNOUNCED THE LAUNCH OF OPERATION S-O-S – SAFE ONLINE SHOPPING.

WE ARE SHOPPING UNDER COVER.

WE HAVE SET UP A SECURE "WAR ROOM" WHERE A HIGHLY TRAINED TEAM OF 10 EXPERTS IS MONITORING THE INTERNET FOR UNSAFE AND ILLEGAL CONSUMER PRODUCTS.

OUR STAFF IS USING CLEAN COMPUTERS AND SPECIAL PHONE LINES.

THEY HAVE NON-GOVERNMENT CREDIT CARDS AND ANONYMOUS SHIPPING ADDRESSES.

WE HAVE ALREADY FOUND SOME VIOLATIVE PRODUCTS.

AN EXAMPLE IS NOVELTY CIGARETTE LIGHTERS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO KIDS AND ARE NOT CHILD-RESISTANT.

JUST THIS MONTH WE RECALLED THOUSANDS OF LIGHTERS THAT THE SOS TASK FORCE FOUND ADVERTISED ON THE WEB.

THEY WERE SHAPED LIKE SCUBA TANKS AND LIKE GUNS -- DESIGNS THAT COULD ATTRACT CHILDREN, BUT THEY WERE NOT CHILD-RESISTANT.

WE RECALLED THEM.

LET ME TURN NOW TO ONE OF OUR MOST IMPORTANT PROJECTS -- UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE FLAMMABILITY.

CPSC'S WORK IS CONTINUING ON THIS HIGH-PRIORITY ISSUE.

LATER THIS YEAR, THE COMMISSION WILL DECIDE WHETHER TO PROPOSE A MANDATORY STANDARD TO REDUCE FIRE-RELATED DEATHS AND INJURIES.

UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE FIRES ARE ONE OF THE BIGGEST KILLERS AMONG ALL THE PRODUCTS UNDER CPSC'S JURISDICTION.

IN 1996, AN ESTIMATED 13,000 RESIDENTIAL FIRES KILLED 650 PEOPLE, INJURED OVER 1,600 AND CAUSED OVER \$250 MILLION IN PROPERTY DAMAGE.

MOST OF THESE LOSSES, INCLUDING 470 DEATHS, INVOLVED CIGARETTE IGNITIONS.

BUT AN AVERAGE OF 100 DEATHS A YEAR INVOLVE SMALL OPEN FLAME IGNITION – MOSTLY CHILDREN PLAYING WITH LIGHTERS, MATCHES OR CANDLES.

ABOUT TWO THIRDS OF THE VICTIMS ARE CHILDREN.

JUST LAST WEEK WE RECEIVED WORD THAT TWO CHILDREN, AGES 3 AND 1, HAD DIED IN A FIRE IN THE BRONX.

ACCORDING TO NEWSPAPER REPORTS, THE FIRE STARTED WHEN THEY WERE SITTING ON A COUCH, PLAYING WITH A CIGARETTE LIGHTER.

THAT IS A TRAGEDY THAT SHOULD NOT HAPPEN.

MOST U.S. FURNITURE WILL NOT IGNITE FROM A CIGARETTE -- BUT IT IS NOT RESISTANT TO IGNITION FROM SMALL OPEN FLAMES.

THE UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE INDUSTRY'S VOLUNTARY PROGRAM FOR CIGARETTE IGNITIONS -- DEVELOPED BY UFAC -- HAS CONTRIBUTED TO SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS IN DEATHS, FROM ABOUT 1150 IN 1980 TO ABOUT 470 IN 1996.

BUT THERE IS NO NATIONWIDE STANDARD --  
EITHER VOLUNTARY OR MANDATORY THAT  
ADDRESSES THE RISK OF SMALL OPEN FLAME FIRES.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT FIRE RETARDANT  
TECHNOLOGY HAS THE POTENTIAL OF MAKING  
FURNITURE LESS FLAMMABLE.

AS MOST OF YOU KNOW, FR-TREATED MATERIALS  
ARE USED IN THE UNITED KINGDOM TO ADDRESS  
UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE FIRE RISKS.

AS MOST OF YOU ALSO KNOW, THE CPSC STAFF  
HAS DEVELOPED A DRAFT SMALL OPEN FLAME  
PERFORMANCE STANDARD THAT DOES NOT SPECIFY  
THE USE OF FR CHEMICALS OR ANY OTHER APPROACH.

UNDER THE STAFF'S PLAN, MANUFACTURERS ARE  
FREE TO CHOOSE ANY APPROPRIATE MEANS OF  
IMPROVING SAFETY.

FURNITURE MANUFACTURERS HAVE REPORTED TO US THAT THEY WOULD MOST LIKELY USE FR-TREATED FABRICS.

THE STAFF HAS BEEN MOVING FORWARD WITH ITS UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE PLAN AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

BUT LAST YEAR CONGRESS INCLUDED LANGUAGE IN OUR APPROPRIATIONS LEGISLATION DIRECTING THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES TO CONDUCT A 12-MONTH STUDY OF FR CHEMICALS THAT MIGHT BE USED TO MEET A FLAMMABILITY PERFORMANCE STANDARD.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE NATIONAL ACADEMY DID NOT MEET ITS 12-MONTH DEADLINE.

THEY ASSURE US THAT THE REPORT WILL BE COMPLETED BY THE END OF APRIL.

HOWEVER, CONGRESS HAS PUT A HOLD ON OUR RULEMAKING UNTIL THE ACADEMY COMPLETES ITS WORK AND THE COMMISSION HAS REVIEWED THE FINDINGS.

WE ARE CURRENTLY WORKING WITH EPA ON A RULE THAT COULD REQUIRE TESTING AND REPORTING BEFORE CERTAIN CHEMICAL COMPOUNDS COULD BE USED IN UPHOLSTERY FABRICS.

THIS RULE WOULD HELP ENSURE, THAT IF THE COMMISSION WERE TO PROMULGATE A REGULATION TO ADDRESS THE SMALL OPEN FLAME HAZARD, ONLY THOSE FR CHEMICALS FOUND NOT TO PRESENT HEALTH OR OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS TO CONSUMERS, WOULD BE USED.

WE'RE ALSO WORKING WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH TO MAKE SURE THERE WILL NOT BE ANY WORKPLACE HAZARDS IF FR CHEMICALS ARE USED TO TREAT TEXTILES IN UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE.

EVEN WITH ALL OF THIS, THE STAFF PLANS TO FORWARD ITS UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION LATER THIS YEAR.

OUR APPROACH IS SCIENCE-BASED AND DATA DRIVEN.

WHEN WE RECOGNIZED THE PAUCITY OF DATA ON TOXICITY AND HEALTH-RELATED INFORMATION ON FR CHEMICALS USED ON TEXTILES, WE HELD A PUBLIC HEARING TO IDENTIFY RELEVANT SCIENTIFIC DATA.

WE APPRECIATE THE ASSISTANCE AND  
COOPERATION WE GOT FROM YOUR MEMBER  
COMPANIES IN PROVIDING SOME TOXICITY  
INFORMATION.

HERE'S ANOTHER WAY YOU CAN HELP US.

YOU CAN DEVELOP AND MAKE AVAILABLE  
INFORMATION ABOUT THE POTENTIAL EXPOSURE AND  
RISK WHEN USING YOUR PRODUCTS ON TEXTILES.

THIS TIME OUR STAFF HAD TO TAKE ON THIS  
RESPONSIBILITY.

IN MY VIEW, YOU AS COMPANIES AND AS AN  
INDUSTRY SHOULD TAKE ON SOME OF THE BURDEN OF  
CONDUCTING STUDIES ON THE CHEMICAL EXPOSURE  
AND RISK THAT COULD RESULT FROM THE USE OF  
YOUR CHEMICALS ON UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE.

(PAUSE)

AS THE COMEDIENNE JOAN RIVERS SAYS:

“CAN WE TALK?”

YOU HAVE A PROBLEM AND I AM HERE TO TELL  
YOU ABOUT IT.

THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF  
MANUFACTURING AND SELLING CHEMICALS FOR USE  
IN CONSUMER PRODUCTS NEED TO DO SOME MORE  
WORK.

YOU NEED TO EVALUATE THE POTENTIAL  
EXPOSURE AND RISK THAT COULD RESULT FROM THE  
USE OF CHEMICALS IN CONSUMER PRODUCTS.

YOU NEED TO DO WHAT IS NECESSARY TO SHOW  
THAT YOUR CHEMICAL PRODUCTS ARE NOT PUTTING  
CONSUMERS AT RISK.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY MARKET THE  
BENEFITS OF YOUR CHEMICALS.

YOU HAVE TO DO MORE.

THE FACT IS CONSUMERS DON'T TRUST  
CHEMICALS – AND THEY DON'T TRUST CHEMICAL  
COMPANIES.

THEY ARE AFRAID OF THE RISKS.

WHEN CONSUMERS HEAR WE ARE THINKING OF  
ADDING CHEMICALS TO UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE,  
THEY GET WORRIED.

YOU HAVE SERIOUS WORK TO DO IF YOU ARE  
GOING TO CONVINCING THE PUBLIC THAT THEY WON'T  
BE HARMED BY YOUR PRODUCTS.

THAT IS A CHALLENGE YOUR INDUSTRY MUST  
CONFRONT.

LET ME NOW TURN TO ANOTHER AREA OF  
IMPORTANCE TO CPSC -- APPLIANCE FIRES.

WE HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN  
ADDRESSING THE FLAMMABILITY OF PLASTIC  
ENCLOSURES FOR PORTABLE ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES.

WE HAVE REACHED OUT TO YOUR INDUSTRY AND  
HAVE ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS MET WITH YOUR  
ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER COMPANIES.

IN 1997, BASED ON FIRE INCIDENT  
INVESTIGATIONS, THE CPSC STAFF RECOMMENDED  
IMPROVEMENTS TO THE UL STANDARD THAT COVERS  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR PLASTIC ENCLOSURES FOR  
ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS -- SUCH AS FANS, IRONS,  
COFFEE MAKERS, HUMIDIFIERS, AND HEATERS.

THE SAFETY STANDARDS FOR COMPUTERS AND  
COMPUTER RELATED ELECTRICAL PRODUCTS -- SUCH  
AS MONITORS, PRINTERS, SCANNERS, AND HOUSEHOLD  
TELEVISION SETS -- ALREADY MEET THE LEVEL OF FIRE  
SAFETY FOR PLASTIC ENCLOSURES.

THESE SAME PROTECTIONS ARE NOW BEING  
SOUGHT FOR OTHER PORTABLE ELECTRICAL  
APPLIANCES FOUND IN THE HOME.

OUR RESEARCHERS OFTEN HAVE TO RE-INVENT  
THE WHEEL TRYING TO DETERMINE WHETHER SPECIFIC  
FR CHEMICALS USED TO MAKE PRODUCTS FIRE  
RETARDANT WILL BE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND SAFE FOR  
CONSUMERS.

YOU HAVE THE EXPERTISE AND RESOURCES TO  
HELP US WITH OUR WORK.

WE NEED TO FIND WAYS TO REDUCE CONSUMER  
PRODUCT FIRES WITHOUT EXPOSING CONSUMERS TO  
CHEMICAL RISKS.

YOUR INDUSTRY SHOULD WORK MORE CLOSELY  
WITH CPSC TO DO THIS.

THIS SHOULD BE OUR COMMON GOAL.

MY FATHER USED TO TELL ANOTHER STORY  
ABOUT THE PR MAN WHO CAME TO MOSES AT THE RED  
SEA AND ASKED WHAT HIS PLANS WERE.

MOSES SAID, "WELL, I THINK I'LL PART THE RED SEA AND LET OUR PEOPLE CROSS.

"THEN I'LL LET PHARAOH'S ARMY GET HALFWAY ACROSS, BRING THE WATER BACK AND DROWN THEM.

"THINK IT'LL WORK?"

THE PR MAN SAID, "I DON'T KNOW, BUT IF IT DOES, I GUARANTEE YOU TWO PAGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT."

I CAN'T PROMISE YOU I'LL GET YOU INTO THE BIBLE IF YOU HELP US WITH THESE CHALLENGES.

BUT YOU WILL BE CONTRIBUTING TO GREATER CONSUMER SAFETY.

WHEN I TOOK OFFICE, I KNEW I WANTED TO FIND WAYS TO WORK COOPERATIVELY WITH INDUSTRY.

OUR JOB AT CPSC IS TO GET UNSAFE OR DEFECTIVE PRODUCTS OFF THE MARKET.

BUT I KNEW THERE WERE LOTS OF GOOD COMPANIES OUT THERE MAKING GOOD PRODUCTS.

SO I ESTABLISHED THE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENDATION AWARD FOR SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO PRODUCT SAFETY.

I HAVE NOT GIVEN IT VERY MANY TIMES, ONLY SEVENTEEN TO DATE IN FIVE YEARS.

IT IS SOMETHING I WANT YOU ALL TO KNOW ABOUT.

LAST YEAR I PRESENTED AN AWARD TO THE AMERICAN WATER HEATER COMPANY FOR DEVELOPING A NEW DESIGN FOR INTRODUCING INNOVATIVE SAFETY TECHNOLOGY FOR GAS-FIRED WATER HEATERS.

IT WILL PREVENT SERIOUS INJURIES AND DEATHS TO CONSUMERS.

THE COMPANY DID THIS WELL AHEAD OF THE REST OF THEIR INDUSTRY.

IT WAS A WELL DESERVED AWARD.

WE ARE ALWAYS PLEASED TO CONSIDER  
NOMINATIONS FOR DESERVING CANDIDATES.

WE WOULD WELCOME NOMINATIONS FROM YOU.

OUR JOB AT CPSC IS TO PREVENT PRODUCT-  
RELATED DEATHS AND INJURIES TO CONSUMERS.

BUT ALL OF US IN THIS ROOM -- NO MATTER WHAT  
WE DO OR WHO WE WORK FOR -- ARE CONSUMERS TOO.

THE WORK WE DO INVOLVES NOTHING LESS THAN  
PROTECTING THE LIVES OF THOSE MOST PRECIOUS TO  
US.

OUR FAMILIES.

CPSC'S BUDGET IS STILL ONLY ENOUGH TO RUN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR ONE AND A HALF  
HOURS.

BUT WE'RE DOING A LOT.

WE'VE DONE IT BY CREATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH  
COMPANIES, WITH CONSUMERS, WITH PARENTS.

WE'VE DONE IT BY GETTING RESULTS.

SOUND IMPLAUSIBLE?

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM SOMEONE BROUGHT  
UP ON STORIES ABOUT A TALKING HORSE?