



UNITED STATES
CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION
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CHAIR ALEX HOEHN-SARIC

**Remarks of CPSC Chair Alex Hoehn-Saric
Consumer Federation of America's 56th Annual Consumer Assembly
CPSC at 50: Looking Forward to the Next 50 Years**

June 15, 2022 - 4:00pm

Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to speak at this year's Consumer Assembly and thank you to all of the attendees for joining us, both here and virtually. Your daily efforts back in your communities drive tomorrow's consumer protections.

I also want to give my thanks to everyone here at CFA for annually producing this one-of-a-kind event. In particular, I want to thank Rachel Weintraub for that very kind introduction, but more importantly for her relentless work and contributions to consumer safety. It truly is a safer world for consumers because of her work, especially when it comes to products in the jurisdiction of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). I'm looking forward to CFA's continued support and partnership around our shared goal of protecting consumers.

As this audience knows better than most, CPSC is an essential agency with a broad mandate to protect all Americans from unreasonable risks of injury or death associated with consumer products. That's an incredible responsibility and one that I and all my colleagues at CPSC take seriously.

Since joining the agency as Chair late last year, I have committed to focusing my tenure on ensuring that we are doing everything we can to protect consumers in the marketplace. As always, this is a team effort. I want to recognize the dedicated staff of the CPSC who work tirelessly every day to ensure that all of us remain safe. During my short tenure, I have met CPSC staff whose jobs have ranged from engineers to port inspectors to accountants to attorneys to investigators and more. What has struck me is that regardless of their profession, they are all completely dedicated to the agency's mission to protect the public from unreasonably dangerous consumer products.

In addition to our incredible staff, there is another group of people who I have the chance to work with every day, and those are my colleagues: Commissioners Dana Baiocco, Peter Feldman, and Rich Trumka. They are all passionate about the work we do. I also have gotten the chance to work closely with CPSC's Executive Director, Mary Boyle. And I am excited to have her join us as a Commissioner, hopefully in the near future.

This year, we are celebrating CPSC's 50th Anniversary. It's a good time to look back at the significant strides CPSC has made to reduce deaths and injuries from the products in our homes.

The data from our early years show just how far we have come. In 1967, at the bill signing for the National Commission on Product Safety – the predecessor to the CPSC – President Lyndon Johnson stated:

The homes that we live in can really be more dangerous than a booby-trapped mine field in the battle area.

He went on to talk about some of the injury and death statistics from that time, including “the 100,000 each year, mostly little children, who have their limbs crushed by the automatic clothes wringers.”

Household products and the hazards that consumer face have certainly changed over past five decades, but I am happy to report on the progress CPSC has made. For example, since our founding in 1972, crib deaths—an area of particular focus for the Commission—have dropped by 80 percent. And serious injuries associated with baby walkers decreased from more than 25,000 in 1992 to about 3,100 by 2020. That's a reduction of 88%.

But the agency should not and has not rested on its laurels. I am pleased that in my first eight months at the Commission we have taken a number of important steps to advance consumer product safety:

We have moved forward on regulatory proposals to ban hazardous magnet sets, to establish strict requirements for the stability of clothing storage units, and to require safety standards for window blinds.

We have established standards for crib mattresses that will go into effect this coming summer.

And we have taken vigorous action to protect infants from dangerous sleep products, to ensure that residential elevators are safe for small children, and to develop more consumer-friendly recalls.

But there is so much more to do, and I am personally committed to building on the legacy of the agency and prepare CPSC for the next 50 years of consumer protection.

When I arrived at the Commission last fall, I identified three areas to help drive our mission and our work going forward. I am pleased to say that we have made progress on each of them:

First, I want the CPSC to be a household name, so that we are the first place the public turns when they hear about a recall or want product safety information or identify a hazard and want to raise a red flag. We must redouble our efforts to meet consumers where they are and help them find us when they need us. This means reaching out to and understanding the needs of all consumers, including vulnerable communities and communities of color. If deaths and injuries are hitting some communities more than others, the CPSC should understand that and communicate about those product categories in a manner that will be heard and acted upon.

Our Equity Action Plan, which some of you here in this room helped to shape, focuses on strengthening our outreach to, and collaboration with, underserved communities on the risks that impact them most deeply.

We have strengthened our outreach to places where consumers are comfortable receiving information. We have completely reformatted our recall communications listservs to make it easier to subscribe and, frankly, easier to read for consumers and the media. And we are leaning in on the use of multiple social media platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook to amplify our safety messaging and our recall announcements.

There are more changes to come. I am pleased that, just a few weeks ago, we welcomed a new Communications Director – Pam Springs, who is here with me today. I hope you will all get to know her. She has a depth of experience and knowledge, which will help move us forward in becoming the household name and the resource to consumers that we need to be.

My second priority is to modernize the CPSC to be better prepared to meet the changing needs of consumers and the marketplace. Among the challenges we face is adapting to the growth of e-commerce. Online platforms that did not exist in their current form a decade or two ago are now driving the market. Consumers are buying directly from unknown manufacturers and importing goods in ways that are harder for us to monitor. While this is a new frontier, we are committed to ensuring that consumers are as protected when they purchase a product from an online platform, as when they buy it from a brick-and-mortar store.

We are doing this by improving our data systems, strengthening our ability to analyze and evaluate large quantities of information, and proactively monitoring e-commerce platforms for non-compliant and recalled products. In addition, we are developing new ways to track imports before they arrive in the country.

Finally, and most importantly, I have been steadfast in my belief that CPSC always needs to put consumers first in the work that we do. While our statutes require us to rely on voluntary standards where they are adequate and are substantially complied with, where those standards are insufficient, we will not hesitate to turn to mandatory rules. In addition to the proceedings I mentioned, we are looking to start rulemakings on adult bedrails, portable generators, off-highway vehicles (OHVs), and more.

In putting consumers first, our focus should be on our most vulnerable populations, especially young children. Caregivers have a right to expect that products sold for use by babies are safe. And if those products turn out to be defective, caregivers should be notified quickly and effectively, and they should be provided with an easy remedy.

More frequently than ever before, we also are sharing safety information with the public about products even absent a recall.

CPSC investigates incidents and fatalities that occur in consumer products, particularly those involving infants. Gathering this information is key to our work and is why it is so helpful when consumers report injuries and deaths involving consumer products to CPSC (at www.saferproducts.gov).

Despite being limited by statutory restrictions that apply to no other federal safety agency when it comes to the release of information, I also am committed to keeping consumers informed to

the best of our ability. So just as we need consumers to share with us their experiences with products, we will continue to share important safety information about specific products by name.

Yesterday, we issued two joint safety alerts with Fisher Price and Kids2. The alerts warn parents and caregivers about 14 reported infant deaths in infant rockers. There were at least 13 reported deaths between 2009 and 2021 of infants in Fisher-Price Infant-to-Toddler Rockers and Newborn-to-Toddler Rockers, and one death in a Kids 2 Bright Starts Rocker. Parents have a right to know about relevant safety information when they purchase products, which is one reason www.saferproducts.gov is so important both to collect information and as a source of information for consumers.

With respect to rockers, if a family already has one in the house or decides to buy one, every caregiver should know that these products should never be used for sleep. If an infant falls asleep in an inclined or upright position, they should be moved to a safe sleep environment with a firm, flat surface such as a crib, bassinet or play yard.

Relatedly, I want to highlight that the CPSC's new rule on infant sleep products will come into effect next week. It will require that sleep products have a sleep surface angle of 10 degrees or less, and that all sleep products conform to the existing bassinet, crib, or play yard standard. The rule will go a long way in helping parents keep babies safer. Many of you here in the room worked diligently and effectively in shaping and supporting this rule.

Before I end, I want to touch on the need to enhance recall effectiveness.

Improving recall effectiveness requires a holistic approach. It encompasses the many different components of the process from the initial decision to conduct a recall, to the point in time – often years later – when the CPSC can feel confident that everything possible has been done to inform and protect consumers of the hazards of a particular product.

I expect the CPSC, manufacturers, and brick and mortar and online retailers to think creatively and work diligently to drive consumer awareness of recalls and access to repairs or redress. Whether it is direct notice to consumers, social media outreach, or regular reannouncements, together we must find ways to increase consumer recall response levels. With one click of a button consumers can purchase and ship products directly to their homes from factories around the world. Recall remedies should be equally accessible to consumers.

After 50 years, it is time to change the mindset that the recall announcement is the end of our role in consumer protection. Far too many defective, dangerous, and noncompliant consumer products remain in circulation – in the hands and homes of those who have no idea they are putting themselves and their families at risk. We must take on – and conquer – this challenge by meeting consumers where they are and arming them with the information and tools they need to stay safe.

Finally, the agency should and has taken strong enforcement action when companies violate the law and the public trust. After a lull in the agency's civil and criminal enforcement activity, CPSC is actively pursuing cases and you should expect to see additional penalties in the future.

Our history will continue to inspire and guide CPSC as we work toward fewer preventable deaths and injuries from consumer products – even as those products and the marketplace for them change.

I want to once again thank the people in this room and in the consumer movement at large and ask for your continued assistance in taking on this life-saving work. The truth is we cannot do it alone. Shining a light on the dangers of recalled products, the failure to accept responsibility by too many manufacturers, and the value to all Americans of a safer marketplace is in the service of a greater good.

And while it may seem at times that the number of us dedicated to consumer safety is small, I will remind you of what Margaret Mead once said:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Thank you again for inviting me.