



**Consumer Reports Oral Testimony to the
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Regarding the
Request for Information and Notice of Public Hearing on
“Possible Improvements to SaferProducts.gov”
Docket No. CPSC-2019-0001**

**As Prepared for Delivery by William Wallace, Senior Policy Analyst
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Thank you, Chairman Buerkle, and thank you to the full Commission and staff for the chance to testify on behalf of the independent nonprofit Consumer Reports. SaferProducts.gov is a useful tool that can be improved through key upgrades, particularly through an open process for feedback like this one. We support the CPSC’s intention to evaluate the database and develop proposed enhancements.

Here are our top priorities as the CPSC carries out that work.

CPSC and All Stakeholders Should Push to Increase Reports to SaferProducts.gov

SaferProducts.gov is fundamentally sound as a publicly available, searchable, and accessible product safety information database. Consumers and others are readily able to provide reports of harm related to the use of consumer products. The site is also useful to Consumer Reports’ safety research, journalism, and advocacy,¹ and we understand that CPSC staff use reports and responses in the database to help assess the risk of harm from a potential product hazard.

At the same time, we’re concerned that reports of harm received via SaferProducts.gov represent an exceedingly small portion of the actual product hazard-related incidents that occur. As discussed, there are far fewer reports in SaferProducts.gov than in other similar government databases that accept reports from consumers. The number of reports collected on the database in more than seven years -- including near misses -- is just over half of the number of estimated emergency department-treated *injuries* associated *just* with nursery products and *just* with children younger than age 5 in the year 2016 alone.²

¹ See, e.g., “Samsung Settles Class-Action Lawsuit Over ‘Exploding’ Washing Machines,” Consumer Reports (Feb. 8, 2019) (online at: www.consumerreports.org/washing-machines/samsung-settles-washer-lawsuit).

² Chowdhury, Risana T., Division of Hazard Analysis, Directorate for Epidemiology, CPSC. *Injuries and Deaths Associated with Nursery Products Among Children Younger than Age Five* (Dec. 2018) (online at: www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Nursery-Products-Annual-Report-2017.pdf?csCaqrGGTngw1gt.tb6tbLz1pLddqUFA).

We all should have a goal to capture as many reports of harm as we can that are eligible to be submitted to SaferProducts.gov. The CPSC should take steps to increase the use of the site by both consumers and others mentioned in statute as those expected to submit reports of harm. We note that the CPSC does a good job making sure that its recall announcements include a reference to SaferProducts.gov, and several of our advocate partners also make sure to mention the database every chance they get in media interviews. For our part, Consumer Reports has referenced SaferProducts.gov in more than 30 different online stories in the last 24 months on our website CR.org, which receives an average of 15 million unique visitors each month.

But more should be done. We recommend a significant increase in general marketing of SaferProducts.gov by the CPSC and additional funding for this activity from Congress. At the same time, the CPSC and stakeholders should pursue voluntary marketing of SaferProducts.gov by industries particularly represented in database reports, and explore opportunities for public service announcements organized and funded as a partnership. We also suggest special CPSC outreach to physicians, medical examiners, and first responders, as these sources could provide a wealth of valuable information to help consumers' purchasing decisions and help researchers conduct more complete analyses.

CPSC Should Redesign and Clean Up Parts of the Website and Ease the Reporting Process

The overall design of SaferProducts.gov can be improved in several ways to help make the site easier to use and more readily understandable by consumers and other potential submitters. In particular, we recommend making reporting links as prominent as possible; establishing greater integration between CPSC.gov and SaferProducts.gov; starting the reporting process immediately from the SaferProducts.gov homepage; designing an infographic to help consumers understand the reporting process better; and introducing automated texting or chat-window capabilities to allow additional convenient ways to file reports.

In addition, we suspect the SaferProducts.gov search results page can be unwieldy to many consumers and researchers. For search results, we recommend adding a higher-level summary page of results, with full results available to view or download. We also recommend routinely cleaning up data to ensure proper spelling and categorization of companies and models, and producing results pages based on product classification that would more reliably reflect the product that is the subject of a search by a site user. This would go a long way toward enabling better analysis by safety researchers. We support the CPSC's idea of creating a data visualization tool to help consumers and businesses better understand the data captured through SaferProducts.gov, but where possible, would urge the agency to provide context in the tool on the severity of the hazard to consumers.

With regard to easing the reporting process on SaferProducts.gov, we recommend that the CPSC add the capability to suggest, auto-populate, or autocorrect entries for items such as brands, models, injuries, and body parts involved. Codes from NEISS for injuries and body parts could be a good resource for that information. Such an improvement would make the data cleaner, enabling better understanding and analysis of the data by users.

We also encourage optimization of SaferProducts.gov for mobile devices and a CPSC app that prioritizes reporting of harm in SaferProducts.gov in addition to providing information about recalls. Eventually, the app could include image recognition capability that would allow shoppers to take a picture of a product they are considering purchasing and receive information regarding recalls or reports for that product, or a similar product from the same manufacturer. Even in the absence of this capability, we suggest developing a simple, intuitive process for uploading photos that requires only one or two steps, in order to help increase the number of photos associated with reports and therefore assist in identification of potentially hazardous products.

CPSC Should Improve Data Source Integration and Public Availability of Reports

CPSC's data is high-quality and includes many sources, but rarely is it presented to the public in a unified manner that draws on all relevant sources. It would be helpful to safety researchers for SaferProducts.gov data to be presented alongside other data sources to get a fuller and more complete picture of a hazard to consumers. For bulk data, it would be helpful for analysis to include associated photos or videos.

Additionally, we support the development of robust artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities to help build a tool for identifying safety-related consumer feedback from online retail platforms and social media. This is a potentially powerful, untapped source of analysis that could be presented to SaferProducts.gov users beside information submitted to the database.

We strongly urge the CPSC to review current practices and procedures to ensure that they promote maximum public availability of reports and follow statutory requirements applying to the timeliness of public disclosure of reports submitted to SaferProducts.gov. We would be very concerned if a significant number of reports that users wish to be made public are being withheld or delayed from publication under conditions broader than those included in the statute.

In response to the CPSC's question about the checkbox allowing reporting users to consent to making their report public: because the reports the CPSC publishes are already prohibited by law from including personal information, we support the box being checked by default to help increase the number of published reports and increase awareness of potentially unsafe products. In advance of this change, we also urge the CPSC to collect and make public aggregate statistics on reports from users that do not wish to have their exact report published. We suggest that this could be achieved, and could provide useful safety information while maintaining privacy in keeping with the wishes of the report's submitter.

Conclusion

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. We look forward to continuing to work with the CPSC to develop and implement enhancements to SaferProducts.gov that would bolster product safety and help protect consumers, including by increasing reports of harm, taking steps to redesign and clean up parts of the website and ease the reporting process, and improving data source integration and the public availability of SaferProducts.gov data.