
August 5, 2008**EDITORIAL****The President and Product Safety**

American consumers, who have suffered years of neglect from government agencies created for their protection, could soon be in for some genuine help. Congress last week overwhelmingly passed the first important reform in 30 years of the creaky Consumer Product Safety Commission. Aides to President Bush have said that he plans to sign the bill into law.

That would be good news, and even better news if he signs it quickly. Consumers have a right to be protected from such hazardous goods, and businesses stand to gain as well. Consumer confidence in product safety desperately needs some help, especially as the nation moves toward what could be a lean holiday season.

Anyone who follows the news knows why this law is needed. Last year alone, nearly 30 million potentially hazardous toys were pulled from the nation's shelves. Many items were covered in lead paint. Others had tiny magnets that could injure a child's delicate stomach.

The safety bill, which passed the Senate 89 to 3 and the House 424 to 1, would essentially ban lead in products for children under 12. It would also require testing of children's products before they could be put up for sale.

Six types of phthalates suspected of damaging human reproductive systems would be banned, either permanently or until further study is done. It would also direct the commission to establish new safety standards for all-terrain vehicles that have caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries, especially to children.

The law would also strengthen the commission, which has long been starved for funds, by authorizing a much-needed budget increase, including \$25 million for a public database. The database would soon let consumers quickly list problems with products, and learn about other consumers' complaints before they made a purchase. There are also protections for whistle-blowers and increased penalties for violating the law.

It is gratifying that even a White House that has spent years fighting worthy regulation now apparently recognizes that this bill is necessary to make today's market safer for consumers and their children.

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