



UNITED STATES
CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION
4330 EAST WEST HIGHWAY
BETHESDA, MD 20814

CHAIR ALEXANDER D. HOEHN-SARIC

**Remarks of CPSC Chair Alexander Hoehn-Saric
International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO) 2022 Annual Meeting
February 16, 2022 12:45pm**

Good afternoon. I want to start by thanking incoming International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization (ICPHSO) President Xiao Chen for that gracious introduction and to thank outgoing President Andy Church and Executive Director Marc Schoem for the invitation to speak today. As many of you know, this is not my first time addressing an ICPHSO conference. Back in October 2021, shortly after my confirmation, I joined you, virtually, at your International Symposium. However, this is my first chance at seeing and meeting many of you in person. I appreciate having the opportunity to share with you my vision for fulfilling the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) mission.

Before I do that, I want to take a moment to recognize the talented and dedicated CPSC staff, whom you heard from earlier today. I am pleased you had the opportunity to hear their presentations and talk with them.

They are professionals who believe in the proposition that science, engineering, data, and consumer education can successfully reduce, mitigate, and even eliminate unreasonable risks of injury and death when it comes to consumer products. They are inspiring public servants and it is my honor to work and learn from them every day.

In addition to the 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. I also have gotten the chance to work closely with CPSC's Executive Director, Mary Boyle. And I am really looking forward to her joining us as a Commissioner.

While we have only been working together for a few months, it has been a great experience to get to know my colleagues and I am certain we will continue strengthen the collegial relationships we have already established.

It is not uncommon for outsiders to presume that bipartisan commissions, like the CPSC, must by their very design be acrimonious. That certainly has not been my experience. While we have not agreed on all things at all times, that has not stopped us from working together where we do agree, on behalf of the American public. And where we don't agree, I have appreciated and welcomed the debate and willingness to disagree without being disagreeable.

It is fitting that we are talking this week, as Saturday marks the 50th day of this new year, and 2022 marks the 50th year of the Consumer Product Safety Commission. While October 27th, 2022 is the exact day the Commission hits that golden milestone, we will be celebrating the agency's five decades of work on behalf of the public throughout this year. We believe there is value in recognizing the significant strides for safety CPSC has taken in reducing deaths and injuries from the products in our homes. This history will continue to help guide us on our journey to a world with far fewer preventable deaths and injuries associated with consumer products.

Please take a look at a short video about our first 50 years: <https://youtu.be/eltQlbNyJiQ>

As you saw, President Nixon signed the Consumer Product Safety Act into law in 1972, establishing the Commission in a form that still would be recognizable by those who attended the signing ceremony. The agency was given authority to tackle consumer product hazards with a bi-partisan board of five commissioners.

The CPSC was a new agency with a broad mission and received commensurate resources. By 1974, the agency's annual appropriation was \$34 million, which is equivalent to \$191 million today. That same year, the agency was authorized for a staff of 786, a figure which reached almost 1,000 by 1980.

For point of reference, CPSC's current annual operating budget is \$135 million and we have a current staff authorization level of 539. This audience is aware more than most of the expanding number of products under the Commission's jurisdiction, both domestic and imported, and the increasing complexity of many of those products. The need for CPSC's technical expertise, dedicated personnel, and modern equipment to provide the level of consumer protection that the public expects and deserves has never been greater.

Of course, a lot has changed since we opened our doors 50 years ago, even if we are only looking from a facilities standpoint. In 1993, we moved into our current headquarters in Bethesda, leaving a behind a location that was described at the time as:

“a building that was originally designed as a residential apartment complex...lacking many features taken for granted in office buildings [which] adversely affects day-to-day operations. The building also lacks a fire sprinkler system and contains asbestos throughout its office areas.”

This was hardly the model for public safety. And we are in a much better place now.

In addition, we opened our stand-alone product testing facility in 2011 where we test products in ways that were unimaginable 50 years ago.

These last 50 years have proven time and again the value of having a government agency that can tackle hazards throughout our lives, from the nursery to the nursing home.

Listen to some of these fatality figures:

From 1973 to 2019, crib fatalities decreased by nearly 80%;

Between 1972 and 2020, pediatric poisonings for all children decreased 80%, and for children under 5 decreased 83%;

From 1980 to 2018, there's been a 64% decline in residential fires – a 63% decline in fire deaths – and a 60% decline in fire injuries; and

Almost a total elimination of refrigerator entrapments. Between 1973 and 1984, 96 children died entrapped in refrigerators. In the last 38 years, there have been two reported deaths, with the most recent being 15 years ago in 2007.

There have been dramatic injury reductions as well:

From 1972 to 2020, power lawn mower and garden tractor injuries have declined by 29%;

Between 1973 and 2020, bicycle injuries declined 35%;

Between, 1975 and 2019, in-ground swimming pools and equipment injuries decreased 55%; and

Baby walker associated injuries that resulted in over 25,000 emergency room visits in 1992 dropped to an estimated 3,100 by 2020. That's a decline of 88%.

What this data represents is important and significant reductions in death and injuries to American consumers. Reductions that were achieved in part by the hard work and commitment of those who have come before us. There are two individuals in particular who have preceded me that I want to take a moment to recognize today. One, with whom I had the opportunity to serve, is Commissioner Bob Adler.

Commissioner Adler received the Ross Koeser award this morning, which ICPHSO gives in recognition of someone who has made significant contributions to advancing product safety. Commissioner Adler, who spent 12 years as a CPSC Commissioner, as well as another stint as a Special Assistant to the first set of Commissioners, is certainly part of the foundation on which we all stand.

Another individual who helped to build and maintain the CPSC we know today is someone we recently lost – Commissioner Thomas Moore. He was the longest serving Commissioner in CPSC history and passed away just a few weeks ago. I worked with Commissioner Moore and his staff on the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act and always valued and appreciated their insights and commitment to public safety.

It is worth repeating: the solid foundation built by these former Commissioners and the other women and men who have dedicated themselves to the CPSC, whether appointees or professional staff is vital, because many challenges remain:

- Drowning deaths continue to be the number 1 killer of small children. It's important to note that Black American children ages 5-19 years old drown in swimming pools at rates 5.5 times higher than white children the same age. Where we see such disparities, we must consider how better to target our outreach and education efforts.
- The Commission has been working on issues relating to portable generators for a long time, because unfortunately, we continue to see more than 75 deaths every year from portable generator related carbon monoxide (CO) exposure. These fatalities are particularly worrisome when it comes to Black Americans who accounted for 22 percent of portable generator-related CO deaths between 2009 and 2019. Which is nearly twice their representation in the U.S. population.
- As I mentioned, pediatric poisoning has been greatly reduced, yet between 2010 and 2019, the CDC reports a 50% increase in poisoning deaths among Hispanic children.
- Another demographic that sees disproportionate impact from unintentional injuries is older Americans, classified as those age 65 and up. This group has far higher rates of medically treated, consumer product-related injuries and consumer product-related deaths than adults ages 55 to 64. In fact, despite making up only 16% of the population this group comprises 71% of consumer product-related injury deaths annually.
- Even if one were only concerned about the economics of consumer product injuries and fatalities, there is a lot to be concerned about. In purely economic terms consumer product injuries and deaths are estimated to cost the U.S. economy over \$1 trillion annually.

In other words, we have a lot of work to do.

Before fully turning to the work ahead of us this year and beyond, I would like to pause for one more historical reference point.

The history of the CPSC actually starts five years before 1972 when President Lyndon Johnson signed the law creating the National Commission on Product Safety. At the bill signing in November 1967, President Johnson said:

“As those of you who are here this morning know, technology has brought us many blessings in this country. But many of them are booby-trapped. Far too many of them cause us great tragedy and present great hazards to us in this 20th century.

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

One hundred and twenty-five thousand Americans are injured by faulty heating devices each year. Many of these victims of the faulty heating devices are the very young who cannot protect themselves, and the very old who are sometimes helpless....

I wonder if it wouldn't be good to remind ourselves of...

--the 100,000 who are hurt and maimed each year by faulty power mowers or faulty washing machines; or

--the 100,000 each year, mostly little children, who have their limbs crushed by the automatic clothes wringers; or

--the 40,000 each year who are gashed when they fall through a glass door; or

--the 30,000 who are shocked and burned by defective wall sockets and extension cords.

And there are just so many other dozens of thousands that we don't know anything about because they either didn't know what did it or it wasn't reported.

So, this summarizes the fact that we live each day and each hour surrounded by a great many hazards that we know nothing about."

In an effort to diagnose the issue raised by President Johnson, the National Commission held hearings and published a 10-volume set of their findings. The most important result of their work was a wide-ranging new law that was aimed both at tackling the scourge of consumer product related injuries in 1972 and the creation of an agency that could tackle the unforeseen challenges from new products that likely could not have even been imagined 50 years ago.

This recognition by President Johnson and the National Commission of the importance – and danger – of what he called “a great many hazards that we know nothing about” (and we now frequently describe as “hidden hazards”) helped shape an amazingly prescient piece of legislating.

That’s why highlighting and addressing hidden hazards holds such a high priority for the CPSC – it’s been in our DNA since we were just an idea in the 1960s.

I was reminded of this a few weeks ago when I had the opportunity to kick-off [Anchor It](#), our consumer education campaign aimed at limiting furniture, TV, and appliance tip-overs. Despite years of effort, tip-overs continue to send over 22,000 consumers to the emergency room every year – and about 26 to their deaths, four out of five of whom are children. When speaking with parents whose children suffered these unimaginable tragedies, one theme was clear - this was a danger hidden in what they believed to be a safe place for their loved ones: their home.

Some of the hidden hazards we continue to focus on today are, in fact, hiding in plain sight throughout our homes but we are working hard to bring these risks out into the light.

In the last few months, you have likely noticed the agency take both regulatory and/or enforcement action on products such as in-home elevators, inclined sleepers, crib mattresses, clothing storage units, magnets, and more.

To be clear, it remains my preference to see speedy reporting and remedial action by manufacturers. They should quickly act when they obtain information reasonably supporting the conclusion that their product has a defect which creates an unreasonable risk or is noncompliant with a federal safety standard.

Yet, as recent months have demonstrated, the CPSC will not hesitate to move forward on our own when we believe it is in the best interests of consumers. This is true in the case of firms who refuse to conduct recalls when our staff finds their product presents a substantial product hazard. And, this is particularly true when it comes to late reporting, which in just the last 5 months has led to the announcement of close to \$100 million in penalties. As I said when the \$91 million Gree penalty was announced by the Department of Justice: “the CPSC will use its authority to the fullest to keep American families safe - failing to report dangerous products puts consumers at an unnecessary risk and will not be tolerated.”

In the months ahead, we will continue to work to address hazards new and old, which endanger consumers, particularly hidden hazards. I hope to take regulatory action to address hazards associated with window coverings, adult bed rails, table saws, clothing storage units, portable fuel containers, and magnet and battery ingestions.

It also is my goal to improve recall awareness and effectiveness. When companies or the CPSC identify a dangerous product in the home, it is not enough to shout a warning into the wind and hope the right consumers hear. We must break through the cacophony of daily life. And reach the parent who is working two jobs a day while struggling to raise a family, the older American living in a retirement home, and the student who may only get his news from social media.

I expect the CPSC, manufacturers, and brick and mortar and online retailers to think creatively and work diligently to increase consumer awareness of and access to recalls.

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 are able to purchase and ship products directly to their homes. Recall remedies should be equally accessible to consumers.

After 50 years, it is time to change the mindset that once a firm announces a recall the process has been completed. Far too many defective, dangerous, and noncompliant consumer products remain in the hands of those who have no idea they are putting themselves and their families at risk. The product safety community must take on – and conquer – this challenge.

Speaking of long over-due actions, I am committed to build diversity in CPSC’s work force and seeking product safety equity for vulnerable and underserved communities. As I discussed earlier, in too many product categories there are significant disparities when it comes to which communities suffer from injuries and deaths related to consumer products.

This is why we are proactively promoting programs that seek to address those disparities. The CPSC will continue to use targeted communications and outreach to enhance our ability to deliver proven safety messaging that can help reduce existing safety disparities in the marketplace. And we will continue efforts to improve our injury and fatality data collection to better identify safety imbalances amongst our communities.

For example, our year-round Carbon Monoxide-Hurricane & Severe Weather Safety Campaign targets vulnerable communities in areas that are prone to severe weather and/or severe power outages. In addition, CPSC conducts outreach to every state to obtain information on how and where to reach underserved populations directly.

It is a recognition of the importance of boots on the ground that led to the American Rescue Plan Act's mandate for CPSC to increase our presence at ports of entry across the country as we work to prevent non-compliant products from ever reaching store shelves or living rooms. Yet, that is not enough. We need to increase our focus on both new and secondary online marketplaces and ecommerce platforms to remove hazardous products from the stream of commerce. We will also continue to ramp up work on another uniquely 21st Century challenge: how to take on defective, dangerous, or noncompliant products made overseas and shipped directly to consumers.

Ultimately, the CPSC serves the public and we can best achieve our mission when we listen to the consumers and those consumers have the opportunity to share information with each other. We want to hear from people about safety concerns they are having with their consumer products. This is why saferproducts.gov is such an important resource and it is also why we continue to grow our outreach to local and diverse communities. We want consumers to play an integral role in improving our rulemakings and our education campaigns. Working with the public will help us more quickly identify and address hazardous products, share vital safety information, and make our communities safer.

Finally, think about some of the hazards President Johnson mentioned in 1967, and how some of those product categories no longer present a hazard - in part because they are no longer in the marketplace. It makes me wonder what consumer products that cause preventable injuries and deaths today will vanish in the next half a century. And what emerging product categories will be the safety challenge for our successors?

Perhaps it will involve chemical hazards? Or artificial Intelligence? Or wearable nanotechnology? Only time will tell, but 50 years of progress when it comes to product safety has made at least one thing clear to those of us who have the privilege of working at the CPSC - the work never stops – and therefore, neither will we.

Thank you for your time and attention this afternoon. I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex D. Hoehn-Saric". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "H".

Alexander D. Hoehn-Saric
Chair, CPSC