

Unit 3 Web Activity

Keeping the Public Safe and Informed

Introduction

You just received a pair of K2 in-line skates as a gift. Your dad is reading the newspaper and calls to you from the other room, “We have to take your skates back to the store!” When you ask why, he shows you this blurb in the paper:

“K2 Corp., of Vashon, Wash., is recalling ‘FLIGHT ALX’ brand in-line skates. The skate’s plastic brake mount could crack and fail, causing the skater to fall and suffer serious injury.”

While you grumble about the hassle of exchanging the skates, your dad explains that there are many organizations as well as an entire government agency dedicated to ensuring that consumer products are safe. He also explains that there are laws that make manufacturers liable for defective products.

In this lesson, you will learn about the legal concept of “strict liability,” which governs who is responsible for problems caused by unsafe products. You will also explore some Web sites of groups that alert consumers to product safety problems.

Background

1. Read a [definition of the term “strict liability.”](#) The term will be used freely in this lesson with the assumption that you know what it means. Write the definition in your notes, along with an example that will remind you how this concept works. When you are finished, use your “Back” button to return to this lesson.
2. Read a [summary of product liability laws](#) from the Legal Information Institute. Pay particular attention to the concept of strict liability. Add this information to your notes on strict liability that you started in Step 1, to make the idea clearer for you. When you are finished, use your “Back” button to return to this lesson.

Part 1: Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)

1. Read the [“findings and purposes” section](#) of the Consumer Product Safety Act that explains why the Act was passed. Take notes on the six reasons that Congress believed the law was necessary and the two purposes of the law.
2. Spend some time reading the [CPSC’s recall page](#). Find at least ten products that have been recalled. List each product and note why it was recalled.
3. The Consumer Product Safety Commission does not have jurisdiction over all products. Read a [list of the products that the CPSC does not oversee](#), and identify which agencies *are* concerned with those products.
4. If you are concerned about a product you think is unsafe, you can report it to the CPSC. Look at the [product incident report form](#).
****NOTE: do not report a product during this lesson. All reports are taken seriously, and you do not want to waste the CPSC’s time.**
5. Every state also has a consumer safety department or office. Find out [who to contact in your state](#) if you have a concern about product safety.

Part 2: Other Sources of Product Safety Information

1. Several other government agencies are responsible for overseeing certain products. See a [listing of these products](#) and which agencies are responsible for each respective product. Find out which agencies are responsible for automobiles, cosmetics, and medical products. Then follow those links and determine how the respective agencies report to the public.
2. There are several private, non-profit organizations that provide education and notification about product safety problems. Check out their recalls and safety tips and see how these organizations publish their information:

[Child Product Safety \(for the state of Arkansas\)](#)

[National Safe Kids Campaign](#)

[NHTSA Firestone Tires Recall Information](#)

[Safety Alerts](#)

Part 3: Reflection

Now it is time to reflect on strict liability laws.

1. How can strict liability laws protect *consumers*?
2. What are the positive and negative aspects of strict liability laws for *manufacturers*?
3. Do you think the CPSC and the private organizations do a good job of informing the public when there are unsafe products? Explain.
4. Do you think it is the government's responsibility to notify consumers about product safety? What other groups or agencies should be involved? (Did you know that sending in the warranty card on a new purchase ensures that the manufacturer will notify you personally if there is a recall?)