

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Product Safety

Be Product Safety Wise

As a consumer you have a right to expect that products you buy are reasonably safe for normal use.

The *Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading Act* empowers the Minister for Consumer Affairs to:

- Prohibit or restrict the supply in the Territory of goods that are dangerous to health or that are a possible source of danger to health;
- Order a recall of defective goods; and/or
- Recommend the making of a product safety standard.

Consumer Affairs product safety officers monitor the marketplace for unsafe consumer products and to investigate reports of unsafe goods.

Consumer Affairs hears about products that are suspected of being unsafe from:

- You, the consumer;
- Consumer organisations;
- The media;
- Businesses;
- Other Government Departments.

As a consumer you play an important role by telling us of product safety problems you have found. It is mainly from your reports that we keep in touch with what is happening in the marketplace.

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- Conducting random compliance checks of retail and wholesale suppliers throughout the Northern Territory;
- Implementing and enforcing mandatory standards;
- Implementing and enforcing recalls and bans;
- Participating in the development of voluntary product standards with industry, other Government Agencies and consumer organisations;
- Informing and educating consumers through the media, newsletters, displays, presentations to target groups and responding to enquiries;
- Investigating and testing potentially dangerous products.

Other government departments may be called upon for opinions on potentially unsafe or dangerous products.

For instance, if the product has an electrical fault it is taken to Power and Water for inspection. They then take whatever action is necessary to ensure that similar goods on the market are safe and suitable for use.

Once all possible avenues are explored, Consumer Affairs then decides what action needs to be taken. We may decide that:

- The product needs modification;
- A warning label should be fixed to the product;
- Supply by retail sale should be restricted or prohibited.

If the matter cannot be resolved by talking to the manufacturer, trader or importer, the Commissioner of Consumer Affairs may recommend to the Minister that supply by retail sale should be restricted or prohibited.

PRODUCT SAFETY STANDARDS

Sometimes it becomes clear that there is a widespread safety problem with a particular product group and that it is necessary to have these products manufactured to a standard to ensure that consumers get maximum protection when using them.

The standard (known as a product safety standard) may cover things like performance and design, how the product is made and packaged, the tests the product should be subjected to and the form and content of any warnings or instructions.

The Toy Standard, based on Australian Standard 1647 is an example of a product safety standard. The standard makes it illegal to supply toys that present an ingestion or inhalation hazard for use by children under the age of 3 years.

In the Northern Territory, we have specific safety standards for baby walkers and domestic bunk beds.

PRODUCT SAFETY NETWORK

Consumer Affairs has a network throughout Australia to help assess the safety of products.

The network is made up of representatives or other consumer affairs agencies, Standards Australia, testing laboratories and other people interested in product safety issues or offering expertise in particular areas.

We frequently contact network members for comment and advice on products that are under investigation.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A CONSUMER

As a consumer you play an important role in making sure products on the market are safe.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU CONSIDER A PRODUCT TO BE UNSAFE

- Report the product to Consumer Affairs.
- Ensure you write down the product's name and the details of where you purchased the product.
- Ensure the product is stored carefully to prevent further damage or injury and Consumer Affairs will arrange collection of the product.
- Don't throw out the product's packaging or the receipt for payment. These documents are important to Consumer Affairs when dealing with complaints.

If you have suffered an injury caused by an unsafe or dangerous product, or you suspect a product to be unsafe, report the matter to Consumer Affairs 1800 019 319.

Further information is also available on the Product Recalls Australia website at www.recalls.gov.au

For further information contact Consumer Affairs

Old Admiralty Towers, 68 The Esplanade, GPO Box 1722, Darwin NT 0801
Ph: 08 8999 1999 - Fax: 08 8935 7727

or

Level 1, Belvedere House, Parsons Street, PO Box 1745 Alice Springs NT 0871
Telephone: 08 8951 8606 Fax: 08 8951 5442

or phone 1800 019 319

Email: consumer@nt.gov.au

Web site: consumeraffairs.nt.gov.au

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