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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

TO : Catherine C. Cook, Director, Product Defect Correction Division
THROUGH: Task Force on Hand-held Hair Dryers

DATE: April 17, 1979

FROM : Lynn S. Lichtenstein, Staff Attorney, Product Defect Correction Division LSL

SUBJECT: Task Force Recommendation For Preliminary Determination Hand-Held Hair Dryers

Recommendation

The Task Force recommends that a preliminary determination be made that hand-held hair dryers which contain asbestos materials exposed to the airstream of the dryer present a substantial product hazard, that identification files be opened in the names of manufacturers, importers, distributors, and private labelers of such hair dryers, and that corrective action be sought from these firms.

Defect

1. Defect as Reported.

Information provided to and obtained by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) indicates that between 20 and 25 percent of hand-held hair dryers previously sold and those still on the market contain asbestos paper or materials as a protective lining around the inside of the nozzle or barrel of the appliance and sometimes as the support for the heating coils of the appliance. These sources indicate that tests performed on the dryers using electron microscopy have identified quantities of respirable asbestos fibers emitted from the dryers while in use. The sources and information available differ as to whether these quantities of asbestos accumulate in the home or are dissipated.

2. Assessment.

The Task Force noted that asbestos in sufficient concentrations is a known cause of lung cancer and a type of cancer known as mesothelioma which afflicts the membranes lining the chest and abdominal cavities. Some of the respirable asbestos fibers which enter the body may become entrapped there and create sites for the formation of cancer.

The Task Force noted further that when released from the dryer, the asbestos fibers may accumulate in a particular environment, such as a home.

The Task Force believed that the insulation function performed by the asbestos paper or other materials in the dryer could also be performed by mica, aluminum, and heat-resistant plastics and that these alternatives do not appear to result in a significant increase in the cost of the dryer to the consumer.

Accordingly, the Task Force considered the use and/or presence of asbestos paper or other asbestos materials in the dryer which are exposed to the dryer's airstream and which release respirable asbestos fibers into the air to be a defect.

Risk of Injury

1. Pattern of Defect.

The defect arises from the design of the hair dryers containing asbestos paper and other asbestos materials which specifies the use of asbestos as an insulator or component part.

The defect manifests itself during normal use of the dryer.

2. Number of Defective Products in Commerce.

It is believed that between 9 and 15 million hair dryers currently owned by consumers contain asbestos. If sales of hand-held dryers in 1979 are comparable to those in 1978, approximately 3 million dryers containing asbestos will be sold. It is not known how many dryers containing asbestos are currently in distributors' and retailers' inventory or with manufacturers.

3. Severity of Risk.

(a) Seriousness of injury - The presence of asbestos paper or materials in the airstream of the dryer may contribute to the inducement of cancer in persons in the environment where the dryer is used.

(b) Likelihood of injury - The Task Force noted that the development of lung cancer or mesothelioma in a person who is exposed to asbestos might take 20 to 30 years or longer. The Task Force believed that the exposure to asbestos accompanying the use of the dryers with asbestos materials exposed to the dryer's airstream creates an unnecessary increase in the risk of cancer from asbestos and felt that injury from this exposure was possible. The Task Force accordingly assessed the likelihood of injury as possible.

(c) Assessment - The Task Force considered the severity of the risk of injury to be high due to the fact that an increased incidence of cancer may result from the use of asbestos-containing dryers.

4. Substantiality of Risk.

Due to the large number of asbestos-containing dryers in consumers' hands, the fact that consumers (many of whom are children) are exposed to respirable asbestos fibers from the dryers during normal use, and the possibility of an increased incidence of cancer from inhalation of the fibers, the Task Force concluded that the dryers create a substantial risk of injury.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS:

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