



Officials Worry About Consumers Lost Among the Recalls

Written On July 6, 2010 By [Bob Kraft](#)

Are U.S. consumers becoming “jaded” by the recent onslaught of product recalls? Are we at the point where we just don’t pay attention? That’s the question asked by the [Washington Post](#) in a recent article. It’s an important question, because the defective product in each of the many recalls could have a devastating effect on one or more families.

Are we suddenly becoming more efficient at finding product defects? Or did our government regulation become so lax in previous years that far too many defective products slipped through into the retail system? Either way, I’m glad the recalls are being announced and I hope that all consumers visit the Web sites of the [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) and the [Food and Drug Administration](#) frequently to check for the latest update information. Here are excerpts from the Washington Post article:

McDonald’s asked customers to return 12 million glasses emblazoned with the character Shrek. Kellogg’s warned consumers to stop eating 28 million boxes of Froot Loops and other cereals. Campbell Soup asked the public to return 15 million pounds of SpaghettiOs, and seven companies recalled 2 million cribs. And that was just a fraction of the products recalled in the United States last month alone.

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Government regulators, retailers, manufacturers and consumer experts are concerned that recall notices have become so frequent across a range of goods — foods, consumer products, cars — that the public is suffering from “recall fatigue.” In many cases, people simply ignore urgent calls to destroy or return defective goods.

One recent study found that 12 percent of Americans who knew they had recalled food at home ate it anyway. After Hasbro recalled the iconic Easy Bake Oven in 2007 because about two dozen children had gotten fingers stuck in the door, the toymaker received 249 more reports of injuries over the following six months. One 5-year-old girl was so seriously burned that doctors had to partially amputate a finger.

“It’s a real issue,” said Jeff Farrar, associate commissioner for food protection at the Food and Drug Administration, who said even his wife has complained about the difficulty of keeping pace with recalls. “That number is steadily going up, and it’s difficult for us to get the word out without oversaturating consumers.”

The problem is twofold: Some people never learn that a product they own has been recalled, and others know they have a recalled product but don’t think anything bad will happen.

“The national recall system that’s in place now just doesn’t work,” said Craig Wilson, assistant vice president for quality assurance and food safety at Costco. “We call it the Chicken Little syndrome. If you keep shouting at the wind — ‘The sky is falling! The sky is falling!’ — people literally become immune to the message.”

The government maintains a Web site, <http://www.recalls.gov>, offering information about all kinds of recalls, and consumers can subscribe for e-mail alerts about specific products. On Friday, federal officials plan to roll out a smartphone application so consumers can check recalls as they shop.