

5-12-00
Children's Safety Event

As Prepared

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS AT CHILDREN'S PRODUCT SAFETY EVENT
THE ROOSEVELT ROOM, THE WHITE HOUSE

MAY 12, 2000

Thank you all – and welcome to the White House.

I want to begin with a story that illustrates why we are here. It's a story about this infant carrier [point], which was sold to thousands of parents who wanted to keep their newborns safe and comfortable. But there was one big problem. On some of these carriers, the lock on the handle would suddenly come undone, causing the seat to flip. Imagine carrying your baby across a busy street, and suddenly seeing him or her fall to the ground.

Starting in 1992, the manufacturer heard story after story like this, and still failed to contact the Consumer Product Safety Commission. In fact, it wasn't until 1996 -- four years after the first report – that this product was finally recalled. By then, the company had received 12 reports of defective handles. In seven of these cases, the children suffered skull fractures.

All of these items here today – the carrier, the stroller, the toy car – had defects that put children in harm's way. All of their manufacturers waited too long to tell the CPSC. I wonder how many injuries and heartbreaks could have been prevented, if these

products had been fixed or taken off the shelves sooner?

We can do better by our children – and today we are taking steps to ensure we will.

I want to thank all the families, leaders of consumer groups, health care professionals, and children's advocates who are here.

We are delighted to be joined by three Members of Congress – Eliot Engel, Lane Evans, and Lois Capps – all of whom are great champions for children on the Hill. In fact, Congresswoman Capps, who will speak later, teamed up yesterday with Congresswoman Morella to announce the creation of a new School Health and Safety Caucus.

We will also hear from Ann Brown, the Chair of the CPSC, and a tireless advocate for children and consumers everywhere. And we will hear from Brittany Cipriotti [Sip-ree-ah-tee], a mother from Virginia whose two children were hurt in a stroller like this one. She will be able to explain in very human terms why we must act to protect our children from dangerous products.

And I am also very pleased that Dr. Marilyn Bull, of the American Academy of Pediatrics, is here to talk about the extraordinary commitment she and other health care professionals are making to help meet this challenge.

We have come here today because too many children in America are being burned, injured, scarred, and even killed by defective products. We are here because too many manufacturers fail to tell the government and the American people that there is a problem with their products -- before it is too late. It's time for that to change.

When it comes to protecting our children from dangerous and deadly products, no one is immune from responsibility -- and that's especially true of the companies that manufacture them.

Most manufacturers want to do the right thing when they find out there are defects with their products. But, we must ensure that all companies have the incentive to do so.

I am pleased to announce that, today, the President sent

Congress a legislative proposal to toughen the laws against companies that fail to report dangerous defects.

It tells them: If you find out your product is dangerous and try to hide that information from the American people, you will pay the price. This new legislation would lift the cap on civil penalties assessed by the commission. It would make criminal violations of consumer safety laws a felony, not a misdemeanor. And it would help ensure that recalls are determined by only one bottom line -- the public interest.

There is no greater tragedy than a child hurt or killed -- especially when it could have been prevented. Now, the punishment for those who keep their dangerous products on the shelves will finally start to fit the crime.

We know that the sooner the CPSC finds out about a dangerous product, the sooner families can be protected from it. But, we also know that the agency must rely not only on responsible companies, but also on alert and active consumers.

And so I am very pleased to announce a new private-public campaign to help identify and remove products that are harming

children. Some of the best people to do this are doctors and nurses, who often treat children right after they are injured.

I want to thank the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Women's Association, the American Nurses Association, and the Emergency Nurses Association for making a commitment to encourage their members to report injury-causing products to the CPSC. I also want to thank the National Safe Kids Campaign for helping ensure that information about recalls reaches thrift shops, day care centers, schools, hotels, and other places where hazardous products might still be in use.

All of today's announcements will give parents more confidence that their strollers, cribs, toys, and other household items will help, not hurt, their children.

No one has worked harder to make that possible than our next speaker, Ann Brown. Time and again, I have seen firsthand Ann's amazing leadership and commitment at the CPSC. I have seen her stand up whenever the safety of children is at stake. I have seen her stand up to protect families from dangerous products. American consumers have never had a better friend. And so, it is

my great honor to introduce the Chair of the CPSC -- Ann Brown.