

Why GAO Did This Study

In the wake of increased product recalls in 2007-2008, Congress passed the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (CPSIA). Among other things, CPSIA required CPSC to establish a database on the safety of consumer products that is publicly available, searchable, and accessible through the CPSC website. In response, CPSC launched SaferProducts.gov (<http://www.saferproducts.gov>) in March 2011, which has two main functions—to provide (1) a mechanism for online reporting of product safety issues and (2) the ability to search for these issues or others, such as recalls. CPSIA also required GAO to study the general utility of the website. This report examines (1) CPSC's efforts to inform the public about SaferProducts.gov, (2) who is using the website and to what extent, and (3) the extent to which consumers have found the website to be useful. To do this, GAO analyzed agency documents and data from 2011 to 2012; interviewed CPSC officials, researchers, and consumer and industry groups; reviewed federal standards, guidance, and best practices for website usability; and conducted website usability tests with 37 consumers in three locations.

What GAO Recommends

CPSC should (1) establish and incorporate metrics to assess efforts to increase awareness and use of SaferProducts.gov, (2) look for cost-effective ways of gathering additional data about site use, and (3) implement cost-effective usability improvements to the site. CPSC supported these recommendations.

View [GAO-13-306](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puente Cackley at (202) 512-8678 or cackleya@gao.gov.

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CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

Awareness, Use, and Usefulness of SaferProducts.gov

What GAO Found

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has used various approaches to inform the public about SaferProducts.gov, including using social media, public service announcements, and printed materials, and promoting the site during speeches and events. CPSC's efforts to inform the public about SaferProducts.gov have been part of a larger effort to raise awareness about the agency as a whole. While CPSC has employed many key practices for consumer education planning, it has not established metrics for measuring the success of its efforts. Without such metrics, the agency cannot determine which efforts have had the most impact on increasing awareness and use of the site.

While CPSC collects some data on the category of persons, such as consumers or health care professionals, who submit reports (one of the main functions of the site), it does not collect data about who is using the site to search for information (the other main function). In addition, to minimize the reporting burden on users, CPSC has not asked for demographic data about the users (such as their age, gender, or income level). Therefore, it was difficult for GAO to assess, as mandated by Congress, whether a broad range of the public has used the site. Moreover, without such data, CPSC has been limited in its ability to target its marketing and outreach efforts to increase use of the site.

Many consumers in GAO's usability tests thought the site generally was easy to use and had helpful information, but identified areas for improvement. The consumers generally could perform basic searches and follow instructions to report an unsafe product, and although none were aware of the site before the tests, most said they would use the site again. However, some of the search functions posed challenges. In addition, some consumers expressed concern about registering with the site and said this might prevent them from completing a report. Other consumers were not clear about the site's purpose, thinking it would focus on safe rather than unsafe products. By addressing the usability challenges GAO identified, CPSC could help users take full advantage of all the available features of SaferProducts.gov. Furthermore, cost-effective federal resources exist across the government to help agencies improve the usefulness of their sites.

SaferProducts.gov Home Page



Source: SaferProducts.gov.