

MANAGE YOUR RISK

Thrift Store Operations - Product Safety

Many non-profit organizations operate thrift stores to help raise funds for their organizations. Thrift stores also help the community by providing discounted consumer products to low-income households. Additionally, thrift stores are eco-friendly because they reduce the amount of outgrown/unwanted items in landfills.

While thrift stores have multiple benefits, thrift-store owners and managers may be unintentionally selling goods that could endanger the consumer and possibly result in liability claims for the organization. It is critical that organizations have formal procedures in place to verify the condition of products and identify items that may be hazardous.

Hazardous Products

Hazardous products are items that pose a danger of death or severe injury. A study conducted by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC, 2000) discovered that 69% of the 301 thrift stores they visited had at least one hazardous product. The top three hazardous products found were drawstrings on children's outerwear, including jackets and sweatshirts that could lead to entanglement or strangulation, hair dryers without corded GFCI protection, which are dangerous when used in wet locations such as a bathroom, and cribs that did not meet current safety standards.

It is important to watch for items that may be ineligible for resale. These items commonly include, but are not limited to:

- Children's clothing with drawstrings
- Hair dryers
- Cribs, playpens and play yards
- Halogen floor lamps
- Car seat carriers
- Children's toys, including basketball nets
- Any item with a recall history

To help consumers and thrift stores understand the hazards in some children's products, the CPSC has developed a [Thrift Store Safety Checklist](http://www.cpsc.gov) available at www.cpsc.gov.

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It is also recommended that organizations post signs throughout the store and at the register stating that all products are sold “as is” with no guarantees or warranties. Claims for injury or damage arising from resold products might be made against a thrift store where the products were purchased. It is important that consumers are aware that products purchased from the thrift store may be hazardous; and, that the thrift store is not responsible for any resulting injury or damage caused by a product.

Safety Verification

The CPSC recalls 250 to 300 potentially hazardous products each year. Even though recalls by the CPSC results in the removal of recalled products from retail shelves, the products may not be removed from consumers’ homes; and, these products may end up being donated or resold in second-hand stores. The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008 (CPSIA) prohibits the sale of recalled products (CPSIA, 2008). CPSC’s laws and regulations apply to anyone who sells or distributes consumer products, including thrift stores, consignment stores, charities, and individuals holding yard sales and flea markets.

- Before accepting or reselling a product, review the list of recalled products provided by the CPSC at www.SaferProducts.gov.
- Thrift-store owners and managers can stay current on information specifically developed for resale stores by visiting www.cpsc.gov/resale.

Conclusion

Thrift stores are likely to carry older products that do not meet current safety standards or have been recalled. To help ensure consumer safety, and limit the organizations liability, thrift-store owners/operators must be aware of recalls, product standards, and bans on consumer products. They must have a process in place for identifying hazardous products and ensuring these products are not offered for resale, as well as a system for alerting consumers to the potential dangers of purchasing thrift store items.

References

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). (2000). Study of hazardous products in thrift stores. Retrieved from <https://cpsc.gov/content/cpsc-study-of-hazardous-products-in-thrift-stores>

Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-314 § 216, 122 Stat. 3056 (2008).

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