

Chairman Inez Tenenbaum
OAS/PAHO *Consumer Protection* Event Speech
Washington, DC, February 28, 2011

Good morning everyone.

To Secretary General Insulza, Director Oliveira, Mr. Linders, Assistant Director Gross-Galiano, and participants in this post-graduate course, welcome to Washington, D.C.

To those who are participating in this training program online, thank you for joining us. I trust that all of you will find this week's program to be a valuable contribution to your product safety management studies.

Let me also take a moment to recognize and thank the Organization of American States and the Pan American Health Organization for being such gracious hosts of this program.

I applaud the OAS, PAHO, and the Government of Brazil for their vision and leadership in establishing the Consumer Safety and Health Network of the Americas.

We are very supportive of this initiative that brings together product safety and health regulators throughout the region to promote the exchange of information, regulatory coordination, and training opportunities.

I believe that training programs like this one are a sign of our commitment—a commitment to developing relationships with regulators and regulatory agencies in other nations.

This regional effort presents many opportunities for synergies with other global and regional product safety initiatives. We are certain that by continuing to work together at regional and global forums we can improve consumer safety here in the United States and in each of your countries.

During the next few days we will be sharing experiences, practices, and challenges with one another and will be looking

for ways to enhance our product safety systems and protect the safety and health of our consumers.

Enhancing consumer safety is a goal we all share, and it is my hope that from this exercise we can find similar solutions to global challenges that affect us all.

During the training we will be discussing widely used benchmarks for ensuring product safety, examining how to apply best practices in market surveillance, and exploring other mechanisms that can be used and adapted by product safety authorities. Mechanisms that can help reduce the distribution of hazardous products in our hemisphere.

The speakers from CPSC from whom you will hear over the next two days are some of the leading practitioners in the United States of product safety compliance, enforcement, research, and hazard identification.

I would like to take a few minutes this morning to share with you some of our accomplishments from 2010 and my top priorities for CPSC in 2011.

We ended 2010 with one of our biggest accomplishments of the year. CPSC staff and the Commissioners came together in December and unanimously approved new baby crib safety standards. This was the first time in 30 years that the federal crib standards had been updated.

These vastly improved standards will usher in a new generation of safer cribs in stores in the United States in the coming months. Safer cribs will bring more peace of mind to parents who just want their baby to have a safe sleep.

Two additional standards for baby products were approved by the Commission last spring. The Commission voted unanimously to establish new federal standards for baby bath seats and baby walkers.

The bathtub and the stairs are clearly two of the most high-risk places in the home for babies and toddlers, and these two rules will help prevent drownings and serious falls.

Switching to cadmium in children's products, I believe CPSC showed that being proactive can help prevent a wave of violative products from coming into the United States marketplace. We demonstrated the ability to learn from past mistakes, and in turn, we held off what might have been a repeat of the wave of lead that swept into the U.S. years ago.

We found dangerously high levels of cadmium in five brands of metal jewelry, which we recalled, and we turned back a few shipments of metal jewelry at U.S. ports before the goods ever made it into the hands of children. The number of units of jewelry recalled due to cadmium pales, however, in comparison to the 180 million pieces of metal jewelry recalled due to lead.

My agency has a special marketplace and port surveillance program that involves screening children's products for cadmium if they have low or no lead, and vice versa.

To stay ahead of the issue, CPSC's scientists developed some of the leading research in our country on daily intake levels for cadmium. And this science is being used by staff to push for the creation of new cadmium standards in metal jewelry and toys.

Another success story in 2010 involved toy safety, especially the effort to get the lead out of toys.

In 2008, there were 172 toy recalls in the U.S.

The number of toy recalls dropped from 172 in 2008 to 50 in 2009, and it dropped again to 44 in 2010.

The numbers are moving in the right direction.

Only three of the 44 toy recalls last year were the result of lead violations. Those three recalls represented a drop from nine in 2009 and 19 in 2008.

Now that's progress.

Toy manufacturers and distributors globally have responded to the calls for compliance with United States lead regulations. The results of the changes made by industry in the supply chain are helping to restore the confidence of American parents—confidence that lead is not being added to toy paints or substrates.

In addition to toys and juvenile products, some other notable accomplishments in 2010 include:

- a joint initiative with the leading food and drug safety agency in the United States to warn parents to not use sleep positioners, and

- an education effort to warn new parents about the potential suffocation danger to babies in certain infant slings.

These are all serious issues that the agency has tackled, issues that impact health and safety, and sometimes life and death. I am proud of the way CPSC staff—many of whom you will meet over the next two days—serve and protect the consumers in this country.

We have taken a look back at the year that was, so let's now turn our attention to this year.

I am optimistic about the year ahead and my optimism is based upon CPSC's safety agenda for 2011.

At the start of last year, I predicted that 2010 would be the "Year of the Consumer" in this country. And in many ways that proved to be true.

Well, just last week I predicated that 2011 is going to be "The Year to Get Connected With CPSC."

From Twitter to Facebook, from SaferProducts.gov to our specialist in helping small businesses, we are expanding the ways that businesses and consumers can interact with the agency.

All of you can connect with CPSC through our blog, widget, phone app, Hotline, and websites.

Through the use of technology and a return to traditional outreach approaches, we are trying to reach the masses and reach targeted communities with our safety messages.

We want families, of all demographics, across the digital divide, to know how they can access safety information and report product incidents. These families need our information. No child or adult should suffer a preventable injury because they “just didn’t know.”

Our initiatives this year aim to save more lives, prevent more injuries, and connect more consumers and businesses to CPSC. These programs include:

- implementing our new, five-year Strategic Plan;
- promoting the activities of our new Office of Education, Global Outreach, and Small Business Ombudsman; and working with our first foreign office in Beijing;
- expanding CPSC's focus on toxic metals beyond lead and cadmium;
- launching in less than two weeks from now an exciting and new public database of incident reports;
- working with childcare associations, hotels, motels, and consumers to educate them on the new federal crib rules;
- launching the second year of a special public education campaign on pool drowning prevention; and
- sustaining our Minority Outreach program, which the agency's Spanish-speaking spokeswoman will discuss with you this afternoon.

I would like to provide some brief insights for you regarding a few of my top priorities.

Our new Strategic Plan will control our agency's heartbeat, how fast it beats, and which muscles support it.

This plan will guide us toward a long-term approach that I believe is best for CPSC and the industries we regulate—that is to be more proactive.

With limited resources, being proactive is a necessary path toward success for the agency. And it is a path CPSC must follow if we truly are to become the global leader in consumer product safety.

I believe that we are knocking on the door of being that global leader thanks to a renewed focus at home on injury prevention and a continuing focus abroad on manufacturing best practices.

On the injury prevention front, we will use the Strategic Plan to conduct even more rigorous hazard identification. From the dangers associated with heavy metals to the strangulation risks associated with window cords and drawstrings in children's outerwear, we have a proven track record of being a global leader in identifying hazards. What

our Strategic Plan will do is help us turn hazard identification into injury prevention.

I would like to shift gears and talk about toxic metals, an issue that certainly has international implications for our domestic marketplace.

The requirements that are in place for lead and the ones that we are working on for cadmium are intended to establish safeguards for the future—a future that does not expose children to these toxic metals. As I have stated previously, all toxic metals need to come out and stay out of toys.

The time is right to expand our vision beyond lead and cadmium. Antimony, arsenic, barium, mercury, chromium, and selenium are in our sights.

Like lead and cadmium, these are dangerous metals for children to be exposed to and there is no good reason to use them or allow them to be introduced into the manufacture of toys and other children's products.

CPSC staff is actively engaged in scientific work aimed at putting us in a leadership role to address these dangerous metals. This is a sign of how we will address chronic hazards through our Strategic Plan.

The last individual initiative that I want to talk about is the one right around the corner. On March 11, we are scheduled to launch our public searchable database of product incidents.

I believe in consumer rights and I believe that an informed consumer is an empowered consumer.

The vision I have for this database, which can be found on the SaferProducts.gov website, is that it generates more reporting to the agency on safety problems. I also envision the site empowering consumers to make independent decisions that further enhance their own safety and the safety of their family.

We have put a good team together to design, develop, and implement the SaferProducts.gov database—we are on time, on budget, and ready to launch it on March 11.

I am proud of the direction we are heading in at the agency. We are trying hard to demonstrate that we can be more agile and more capable of stepping in front of emerging hazards. These are essential elements of our Strategic Plan.

I believe that we have the right team in place—a team willing to work in partnership with others who are also committed to advancing product safety, and a team willing to take action against those who do not believe in following the law.

Being proactive and collaborative are the keys to our regulatory approach.

If all of us can be partners in this effort, I know that we can build upon the progress that has been made in recent years.

Progress that will help all of us reduce violative products in the marketplace.

Progress that will help all of us keep those whom we are sworn to serve safe from dangerous products.

Thank you all for your time today. I look forward to continuing to work with the OAS, PAHO, and all the member countries to promote consumer safety in our hemisphere.

Best of luck with your post-graduate work and enjoy your time in Washington.