



The CPSIA (Consumer Product Safety **Improvement** Act)

. . . No Improvements Here!

By Gail A. Siegel, Director of Membership Services

The National Association of Resale & Thrift Shops (NARTS) has been living and breathing the CPSIA for some time now. However, the Act—turned law—made retroactive by Cheryl Falvey, CPSC General Counsel—may be one of the most quietly passed laws in a long time. Its outcome of doom evaded the attention of many industries most affected—including resale industry shop owners, NFP thrift stores and ever growing by the thousands, the consumers who rely on children’s resale to care for their children as well as those dependent upon the proceeds from the NFP organizations that feed, clothe and shelter the growing number of those in need in this country. The thing is . . . we were barraged over and over again with a lot of other information last summer and fall when this law was passed, but where were all the news stories, special reports and important broadcasts regarding the CPSIA?

We have been told that “we cannot depend upon the government alone to create jobs.” To take it a step further, we hear that “only the government can provide the short term boost necessary to lift us from a recession this deep and severe.” Where is the providing and lifting when tens of thousands of jobs within the resale industry are being threatened by the very government that says they are going to save us? We did not need help so desperately until this well intentioned law went far, far awry. As always in government, there is much finger pointing when it comes to the blame for the dire economic situation faced by the US today, including placing the blame on “the profound irresponsibility of the halls of power in Washington, DC” . . . and so it goes . . . and so it continues. This is not a political stance of any kind. If this mass of confusion and potential devastation surrounding the CPSIA was not approved and passed into law by our elected officials, politics would play no part in the plight of children’s resale today. Yet the truth is what it is.

Remember when I talked about all the “important” information we had been overwhelmed with last fall? Well, while you were missing all the news about the CPSIA—unless you were living under a rock—you were reminded for almost two years to a point bordering bizarre about what you had to do by February 17, 2009 to prepare yourself for the big changes to come regarding digital television so that you would not miss anything on the boob tube! If you still have any questions about that conversion, you will continue to hear much, much more. The info will be straight forward and clear. However . . . take heart all because—**NEWS FASH**—the President and your elected officials have found time while they are saving the economy to postpone that February 17th deadline for television conversion. I think it was brought to a vote because of concern over the “hardships” that would be caused by the lack of funding needed to help consumers purchase the necessary boxes for conversion. After all this time, the time is just not right. Are you kidding me! While resale professionals are in fear of losing their livelihood, their homes and the security they have worked so hard to provide for their families, **and** tens of thousands could be added to the jobless numbers **and** thousands more faced with losing the benefits of charities surviving only because of resale stores, at least we won’t have to worry about anyone missing their soap operas or shopping on QVC! Don’t you feel all better now?

In this time of record unemployment, growing homelessness, hungry children and garbage filling every nook and cranny of the world, resale has stepped up to the plate to rise above it all. “Green” is a word we fully understand. Reuse and recycle are a part of our motto. Resale is the mother of thousands of jobs created by entrepreneurship. These hard working people pay their taxes, and they pay for their own health insurance. They are not reaching out their hands for yet another government bail out! The need for job placement, shelters and feeding the growing numbers of the hungry and cold are met by many NFP stores. They work endlessly and unselfishly for their charitable organizations to replace what many have lost during this economic disaster. These people of resale want and deserve the right to work without threat of breaking a law that lacked research and was spawned by products allowed to be imported into this country with lethal amounts of lead and a little melamine and antifreeze thrown in for good measure. After that, the knee jerk reaction to better protect our children is now the CPSIA. The truth is, you can raise standards to the impossible, but if the powers that be do not do their jobs, the point is moot! Every single product that does not meet the new lead standards can be taken to the dumps. Children’s resale shops may all have to close. Benefits from NFP shops may be seriously lessened and consumers may be forced to purchase whatever they can afford at giant discount stores. However, when all is said and done, do you really believe the recalls will end? Who *is* protecting our children? Who *is* watching out for the real dangers threatening our children? How many children have been endangered by the lead amounts in legal merchandise—**conforming to all other safety standards**—before the CPSIA? Isn’t the true danger in the unlawful and uncaring manufacturers whose nonconforming products are overlooked and introduced into the mainstream market time and time again?

Resale professionals are not “goodie goodies,” but they work under high standards and ethics. Children’s safety has always been a priority. We are linked to CPSC in a constant endeavor to prevent the sale of recalled items—often taking them out of the market place with no benefit or income—just to prevent their sale in garages, flea markets or online. Our stimulus plan includes hard work, a code of ethics and selling quality merchandise at an affordable price to add to economic growth rather than add to its decline.

Resale cares, really cares about the safety of our children and so we say . . . raise safety standards. Lower the maximum lead acceptance standards. Do whatever you must for the safety of our children, but do not make the sale of **perfectly safe and useful** children’s products illegal to make yourselves look like heroes. Oh, and by the way . . . what happens when the standards are reset to 300ppm and then again to 100ppm? Are all the products manufactured under the CPSIA of today to be considered hazardous under the new standards to come? Something is wrong . . . **very wrong** with the CPSIA as it stands today! The powers that be—and they are many and powerful—may admit it is wrong, say the outcome was unintended and speak in circles when it comes to solutions, but nobody has taken direct steps to fix it! Your elected officials are far too busy with the process of “stimulating new jobs” to care about those that will be lost and the CPSC seems to be spinning in circles and coming up with “remedies” that change or fix nothing! Since this mess with the CPSIA began, nothing has changed about its outcome for the resale industry. February 10th looms over us like a big black cloud that grows ever darker. A storm is coming and we are left, as usual, to wonder if anybody with any power really cares what devastation we will have to endure because of the CPSIA. No change . . . no improvements here.

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