



Australian
Competition &
Consumer
Commission

Product Safety Bulletin for businesses

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT: Hot water bottle compliance

May 2013

This bulletin provides information about the laws you must follow if you sell hot water bottles in Australia.



Dangers of hot water bottles

On average, about 100 people are hospitalised every year in Australia for serious burn injuries associated with hot water bottles.

Many of these injuries require operations and leave scars. Burns can also permanently damage the skin. In serious cases, this can also prevent movement of the burnt body part.

Many burns are caused because people fill their hot water bottle with boiling water. Filling bottles with boiling water can cause them to burst, leak or split, burning the skin instantly.

Direct skin contact with a hot water bottle can also cause serious burns—sometimes without the person even noticing.

Most victims of hot water bottle burns are elderly women and children. They are likely to suffer more serious burns as their skin is thinner and more delicate.

The laws have been made to help protect people from being seriously burnt when using hot water bottles.

Hot water bottle laws in Australia

It is against the law in Australia to sell hot water bottles made from rubber or PVC which do not meet the requirements of the mandatory standard for hot water bottles.

This law aims to protect people who use hot water bottles from the possibility of serious burns.

The mandatory standard for hot water bottles is the *Trade Practices (Consumer Product Safety Standard) (Hot Water Bottles) Regulations 2008*.

For a copy of the regulations, visit Product Safety Australia website at www.productsafety.gov.au and click through the following links: Bans, standards and recalls—Mandatory standards—Hot water bottles.

The law is similar to, but not the same as the voluntary British Standard BS1970:2006 *Hot water bottles manufactured from rubber and PVC*. Most bottles in Australia are sold on the basis of being made to the British Standard.

However you must check that bottles made to the British Standard also meet the different labelling requirements of the Australian mandatory standard.

What does the law for hot water bottles require?

The law requires the bottle to:

- be permanently labelled with the safety warning “Do not use boiling water”
- have a safety warning message about placing bottles directly on skin

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- have a safety warning message about not over-filling the bottle
- meet minimum performance requirements to prevent bottles bursting, leaking or splitting.

What does the law mean for my business?

Officers from the ACCC and the state and territory consumer protection agencies buy hot water bottles from retail businesses from time to time. They check the labelling and organise testing to find out if the hot water bottles meet the minimum performance requirements.

If bottles do not pass the tests, your business and/or the business that supplies to you will have to:

- remove bottles from sale and you may also have to ask people who have bought bottles from you to return them to you (removing bottles from sale and asking people to return them is called a product recall)
- advertise to the public that bottles are recalled, the reasons why they are recalled and that they should not be used
- give refunds or new (legal) bottles to customers who bought the unsafe or illegal bottles
- destroy the bottles if they cannot be fixed to be sold legally.

Recalls can be costly for your business and if you do not manage a recall well, it could badly affect your reputation with customers. Also, if someone is burnt while using a hot water bottle bought from your business, they may take you to court to claim costs for injuries.

If you break the law, you may have to pay a fine or the ACCC may take you to court.

Problems found in hot water bottles

Some of the problems found with hot water bottles include the:

- safety warning and safety messages were not on the bottles or the packaging
- warning on the bottle was not easy to see or read
- rubber or PVC was thinner than the minimum required thickness
- bottles did not pass the seam strength test
- bottles did not pass the stopper test.

How do I check that the hot water bottles I sell are legal to sell?

Suppliers, including retailers, wholesalers, importers and manufacturers are all responsible for making sure hot water bottles they sell are legal.

To check if the hot water bottles you intend to sell are legal, you should ask your supplier to give you a written report showing that the hot water bottles have been tested to the requirements of the law.

You should keep this report because the ACCC or state and territory consumer protection agencies may ask to see it when they do their checks. You should also check the report to see if the bottles tested are the same as the stock you have, that the report is less than 12 months old, and that all the required tests have been passed.

If your supplier cannot give you this proof, then it is recommended you buy your hot water bottles from a supplier who will give you the proof.

If you are not sure if hot water bottles you sell meet the requirements of the safety law, you should not sell them.

Changes in the law

From time to time the laws change and this includes the law for hot water bottles. Work on changes has started and we expect that there will be more requirements for hot water bottles in 2013-14.

Register for email updates on the Product Safety Australia website to stay up-to-date with the changes.

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