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Baby Bath Seats Give Parents False Sense of Safety: Consumer Groups Asks Government to Ban Deadly Product

Washington, D.C. - Consumer Federation of America (CFA) today joined with eight other consumer and safety organizations to petition the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to ban infant bath seats. Citing continued deaths and a deadly misperception by parents and caregivers regarding the product's safety, the groups asked CPSC to reconsider its 1994 vote against rulemaking.

"Baby bath seats are an invitation to danger. Since 1994 when CPSC decided not to take action, an additional 52 deaths have occurred. Enough is enough—the assembly line for this product should be shut down immediately," said Mary Ellen Fise, CFA's General Counsel and author of the petition.

To date there have been at least 66 drowning deaths to infants and 37 reports of near drowning incidents. In the first six months of 2000 alone, five babies have died. When CPSC last considered this issue, just 14 children had drowned.

Drownings typically occur when the infant tips over, climbs out of, or slides through the product. In most, but not all cases, the child is left unattended for a brief time by the parent or caregiver.

A recent study conducted by Dr. Clay Mann, Intermountain Injury Control Research Center, found that parents and caregivers of infants that use baby bath seats engage in more risk taking behavior than parents and caretakers not using bath seats. Caregivers using bath seats prepare baths with deeper water and are more likely to leave a child unattended in the bath for conscious, willful reasons (e.g., to perform household chores). There is a false sense of safety that is propagated by having a mechanical aid to "help" to hold a slippery baby upright. This "sense of security" promotes the idea that a child could be left alone in the bath for "just a minute."

Baby bath seats (and products called bath rings) are intended to assist in bathing infants by holding the infant in a sitting position in a full size bathtub. These products usually have suction cups to hold them in place in the bathtub and a plastic seat with leg openings to secure the baby in a sitting position while being bathed. With a bath ring, the baby sits directly on the tub surface or on a mat attached to the legs of the bath ring.

Infant bath seats have very limited utility. They are not recommended for use until 6 months of age, when most infants can sit securely. Once an infant can pull up (generally between 7 and 9 months of age) or attempt to stand while holding onto objects, infant bath seats should be discontinued, since the infant could climb from the seat. This time interval indicates that bath seats have a useful product life of approximately 2 months.

Joining CFA in the petition were: The Drowning Prevention Foundation, The Danny Foundation, Intermountain Injury Control Research Center, the California Coalition for Children's Safety and Health, the California Drowning Prevention Network, The Contra Costa County Childhood Injury Prevention Coalition, the Greater Sacramento SAFE KIDS Coalition, and Kids in Danger.

Baby bath seats sell at retail in the \$10-\$20 range, making them affordable for most families. CFA recommends that families **not** purchase bath seats found on retail shelves or at yard sales and **not** use bath seats loaned by friends and family. "Throw your baby bath seat away and remove this potential risk of drowning for your baby today," advised Fise.

In addition CFA (as well as CPSC) recommends that parents and caregivers never leave a baby alone in the water for even a second and that they keep their child in arms' reach at all times.

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CFA is a non-profit association of over 260 pro-consumer groups, with a combined membership of 50 million, that was founded in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through advocacy and education.

Web address: www.consumerfed.org