

## Nation & World

# 900,000 bassinets targeted

1 of largest child product safety actions in years cites deadly design problem

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TRIBUNE REPORTERS

Federal regulators on Thursday night directed retailers across the country to stop selling and to recall nearly 900,000 dangerous bassinets, one of the largest child product safety actions in years.

The move followed a day of confusion for consumers, retailers and even regulators who were unclear about which bassinets contained a design problem similar to one that resulted in the deaths of two babies.

In fact, a Tribune reporter on Thursday bought two bassinets at Baby Depot at Burlington Coat Factory on the West Side. Before the reporter left the store, an employee checked the model numbers to see whether those versions contained the deadly flaw. She told the reporter they did not.

But she was wrong. Both had the dangerous design.

Much of the confusion stems from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's issuing a consumer alert late Wednesday about the bassinets but not stating which model numbers were affected. The alert was issued after Tribune inquiries.

Then, Thursday evening, the agency released 66 model numbers affected and announced that six major retailers voluntarily agreed to recall the products in question: convertible "close-sleeper/bedside sleeper" bassinets manufactured by the now-defunct Simplicity Inc. of Reading, Pa.

The retailers recalling the bassinets were Wal-Mart, Toys "R" Us, Kmart, Big Lots, Target and J.C. Penney. It remained unclear Thursday night how many other retailers sell the items.

At Baby Depot, where the Tribune bought flawed bassinets, a store manager referred calls to corporate headquarters but no one could be reached. The model numbers on both bassinets were among those cited Thursday by the safety commission.

Because of the holiday weekend, Baby Depot and other Illinois stores have until the end of Tuesday to cease sales of the bassinets.

In its consumer warning, the commission urged people not to use Simplicity bassinets with drop-down sides that allow a parent easy access to a baby but create a gap where a baby can slide through and hang to death. Two babies have died that way. The commission's alert came 11 months after the first baby's death. A second child died a week ago.

"Due to the serious hazard these bassinets pose to babies, CPSC urges all consumers to share this safety warning with day-care centers, consignment stores, family and friends to ensure that no child is placed to sleep in a Simplicity convertible bassinet covered by this warning," the alert said.

The commission said it issued the alert because SFCA Inc., a former Simplicity creditor that purchased



The Tribune bought this Simplicity 3-in-1 bassinet Thursday at a Baby Depot on Chicago's West Side even though federal regulators issued a consumer warning that such bassinets had killed 2 babies.

Tribune photo by Bill Hogan

### Model numbers of dangerous bassinets

343-8363	3013PRO	3040SPR	3070MAN
343-8399	3014LOL	3040SPRC	3111DPC
3000CL	3014NGS	3040WDS	3111ZOL
3010BJ	3015GFR	3045DRM	3112BDY
3010BJC	3016LAU	3045DRMC	3112DOH
3010HAV	3016MIR	3045FEL	3112DOH6
3010NGS	3017NCB	3045OXFC	3112DOH7
3010TGT	3020SFB	3046GTM	3122BAN
3010WHE	3025BER	3046HAN	3122TGC
3011WHK	3025C	3047MON	5730FKB
3011WHK	3026CRT	3050LIL	5750SAR
3012BJ	3027MIS	3050SWT	8393
3012LLTC	3030SAR	3050SWTC	9250A
3012OXF	3040CLA	3050SAR	9250B
3012SFD	3040LAC	3060BTL	TD2500
3012SOM	3040LAU	3060GFS	
3012TGT	3040SAR	3060TFS	

Simplicity's assets in May "has refused to cooperate with the government and recall the products."

SFCA countered by saying Simplicity products are not its responsi-

bility. "The products in question were manufactured and distributed by Simplicity Inc., a company that is no longer in business," SFCA said in a written statement. "SFCA pur-



The bassinet's design is potentially deadly because babies can slide through the space between the metal bars and get their heads stuck and hang to death, as demonstrated here with a doll. If you can fit a soda pop can between the slats of a crib or a bassinet, don't use it, federal regulators say.

chased Simplicity's assets at auction after Simplicity Inc. went out of business and has no legal liability for any products distributed previously by Simplicity."

### IN THE WEB EDITION



Read the Tribune's Pulitzer Prize-winning investigation of hazardous children's products. The series pushed Congress to pass the broadest reform of consumer-product safety laws in a generation and prompted massive recalls.  
[chicagotribune.com/hazards](http://chicagotribune.com/hazards)

But one of the deadly bassinets the Tribune purchased Thursday carried a shipping label with the name "SFCA Inc." This seemed to contradict the written statement SFCA issued Thursday: "The CPSC product alert does not involve any product manufactured and distributed by SFCA Inc."

Asked to explain this discrepancy, SFCA spokesman Paul Nathanson would not comment directly. Instead, he wrote in an e-mail: "As far as I know none of these model numbers were manufactured and distributed by SFCA."

Julie Vallese, a spokeswoman for the safety commission, would not comment on its dispute with SFCA. She said the agency decided not to pursue a forced recall because such an action could end up in court and take years to resolve.

Instead, the agency is directing the nation's retailers to stop selling the bassinets. Vallese said she hoped all stores would comply. If not, the agency would have to study whether it could use its authorities under the recently enacted Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act to compel stores to cease sales.

In Illinois, the rules are tougher. Once the commission has issued a consumer warning, retailers have three business days to remove the item from shelves, said Sara Smith, deputy chief of staff for state Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan.

Smith said the state plans to subpoena information from SFCA to determine which firm is responsible for the flawed cribs. "Consumers were left high and dry because of the acquisition of Simplicity by SFCA," she said.

She said it was alarming that the safety commission did not take action on the bassinets after a baby died last year. "It's unspeakable," she said. "It's another massive problem."

Even the newest versions of the bassinets—allegedly fixed to prevent future deaths—allow parents to assemble the product in a way that still contains a potentially deadly gap. Though a baby is less likely to wriggle through that gap if parents follow the age recommendations, it's still possible, said Nancy Cowles, executive director of Kids In Danger, an advocacy group based in Chicago.

By law, that gap would not be allowed in a crib. But because the product is a bassinet, it's not illegal.

Cowles and others criticized the safety commission for failing to recall the bassinets last fall, when the first baby died. A recall might have prevented the second death, she said.

"For the CPSC to say 'We're acting quickly' when there was a death . . . a year ago is obviously not true," Cowles said. "Whether they were stymied by the company or their own slow-moving bureaucracy, this child is dead because of it."

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