

Product safety

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PRODUCT SAFETY—SO WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

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Rushton Martin. *Ministry of Consumer Affairs 33 Bowen Street Wellington New Zealand*

Product safety concerns—both real and perceived—are increasing around the world both numerically and in complexity. Scientific discoveries and technologies rapidly flow through to consumer products incorporating innovative and novel features being placed on the market.

Against that backdrop product safety practitioners are frequently confronted with having to assess and manage risks with limited data and experience to draw upon, compounded by fiscal constraints that feature in many jurisdictions.

There are no ‘quick fixes’. It is easy to say that there should be laws or standards covering these issues. The breadth and diversity of products on offer to consumers who demand innovation inevitably means that legislation and standards development will be playing ‘catch up’. Proponents of a precautionary approach suggest that unless a product is proven to be 100% safe it ought not to be on sale. Proving a negative is notoriously difficult.

Given these realities, who is responsible and how can the risks around consumer products be best mitigated?

This presentation is aimed at prompting debate around these issues with the presenter drawing experience gained over 30 years as a product safety regulator in the UK and more recently in New Zealand. Using examples of current product safety issues to illustrate these challenges; the presentation will point towards a multi-faceted based around a greater sharing of roles and responsibilities amongst stakeholders from governments, businesses and NGOs through to consumers themselves.