



AUSTRALIAN COMPETITION
& CONSUMER COMMISSION

How to communicate and advertise a consumer product safety recall

Ensuring effective product recalls—your responsibilities

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Do you supply products to consumers? If so, then you must understand your quality control and safety obligations.

This factsheet outlines your obligations regarding notifying and communicating a voluntary product recall. You will also find suggestions on how to make your recall more effective.

The benefits of effective recall communication

It's critical to tell customers about recalls of unsafe products as quickly as possible. Doing so will help:

- prevent injury or death
- reduce your risk of legal liability through consumer injuries
- protect your reputation, and
- create an effective recall.

Getting a recall right the first time will save you time and money. Revising a recall later or changing the message can be confusing for customers.

Your recall communication needs to include the following steps:

Step 1—notifying the ACCC

Under the Australian Consumer Law (ACL), suppliers must notify the Commonwealth minister responsible for competition and consumer policy within two days of initiating a voluntary recall action. The ACCC accepts recall notifications on behalf of the minister.

If a death or serious injury or illness has been associated with a product, you also need to lodge a mandatory injury report with the ACCC.

You can submit a recall at www.productsafety.gov.au.

The online form will ask you to specify:

- your contact details, so that we can discuss the recall with you
- what products are being recalled
- why they are being recalled
- whether your products do not comply with a mandatory safety standard or are subject to a ban
- the nature of any harm that may be suffered by consumers
- where your products were sold
- how you'll communicate your recall to your customers.

Step 2—reaching customers

As a business, you should know your customers better than anyone. Therefore, you should be able to identify the best ways to reach them.

Think about how your customers learn about your products. Is it through paid media advertising, social networks, search engine marketing, email campaigns or public relations? Does your store have an online presence only, or are there physical outlets? You need to choose the communication methods best suited to your target audience.

Consider who your customers are when you think about what message to include in your recall—how will you catch their attention and make them act on your recall? You don't have to limit yourself to only one option. Different types of customers may require different communication styles.

What to say

Use simple language to make sure that customers will understand your message. The simpler the message, the better. Technical language may be useful for describing a product defect, or if your product could cause an injury when used in a specific way.

Whatever the communication channel or language you choose, you need to be clear and consistent

about your message. You should include the following information:

- What goods have been recalled.
- How to tell whether a particular product is part of the recall.
- Why the product is being recalled.
- The nature of any hazard and how the use or foreseeable misuse of a product could create the hazard.
- Any important safety messages—do people need to stop using the product, etc.
- What customers should do with a recalled product.
- Whether there be any waiting period for repairs or exchanges.
- What customers should do if they don't have their proof of purchase.
- How customers should contact your business to discuss the recall.

The language you choose must not downplay the potential danger or likelihood of a defect occurring. If you do not clearly communicate the level of risk, or the nature of any hazards, you risk damaging your brand and reputation.

You may also risk legal liability if a consumer does not understand your recall notification.

Consider the following description of a hazard due to a product defect:

- *The defect may result in a thermal event.*

A better way of explaining the hazard would be:

- *The defect may cause a fire.*

In the first example customers may think you are downplaying the hazard or not being honest. In the worst case, they may not act on the recall because they don't understand the hazard or consequences.

Don't forget that [consumer guarantees](#) still apply, even when a recall is in progress.

Where to say it

You should make a list of everyone affected by the recall, and consider the best ways to reach them. In most cases, a combination of advertisements in different media will be appropriate. When making decisions about media, you should ask yourself:

- Who are our customers?
- What media do they read or engage with?
- What are their age groups and where are they located?
- Can our existing communication channels be used?

- Do we have active and engaged Facebook/ Twitter followers or up-to-date email distribution lists?
- Does our business collect warranty details at the point of sale?
- Are we active on community blogs or forums?
- Could other businesses in our supply chain assist us in contacting our customers?
- Can we draw on experience from similar businesses that have issued recalls?

Get started

Consider the following when preparing a recall:

- When will you notify the ACCC (must be within two days of taking action to recall a product)?
- When will the recall be communicated to customers?
- What message will be communicated to customers?
- How will you communicate the message?
- How will customers contact you about the recall?
- How will you deal with customer complaints?
- Do you need to give your staff training and support?
- How can you use this experience to improve in the future?

More information

Recall information is available from www.productsafety.gov.au/recalls. You can also refer to the [ACCC Consumer Product Safety Recall Guidelines](#).

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