



NORTH CAROLINIANS AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE EDUCATION FUND

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Enact Consumer Protection Standards for Guns

Question: Which of these two products has more safety regulations?



Answer: The teddy bear, which is covered by at least four types of federal safety standards. There are no federal safety standards for the domestic manufacture of guns.

Guns: Inherently Dangerous and Unregulated

Guns - like prescription drugs, insecticides, household chemicals, and many other products commonly found in American homes - are inherently dangerous. They cannot do what they are designed to do without risking injury to the user or bystanders. But there's a big difference between guns and other inherently dangerous consumer products: guns are not regulated for health and safety.

Yet many Americans believe that guns are subject to the same health and safety regulations as other consumer products. A 1998 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) survey found that 71 percent of Americans thought that guns were regulated by federal safety standards.

Toys and Cars: Regulated for Safety More Than Guns

Even products that aren't inherently dangerous - from children's toys to food and cars - are regulated for safety more than guns. Congress has given regulatory authority to federal agencies to assure that virtually every consumer product in America is safe. For example the:

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) regulates the safety of consumer products used in the home, and in recreation

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has authority over foods, drugs, cosmetics, and medical devices

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) sets safety standards for cars

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is in charge of toxic chemicals and pesticides

By comparison, no federal agency has the power to ensure that guns manufactured and sold are safe. Also, no federal agency has the authority to ban firearms technology that poses an unreasonable risk to public safety.

Just imagine if car companies could introduce new cars with no built-in safety protection, if drug companies could sell untested drugs at will, or if there were no requirements for the safety and inspection of meats - but, that's what we have given the gun manufacturers!

The Result: A Grim Record of Death and Injury

Firearms are the second leading cause of product related death in America. In 2000 alone, more than 28,000 Americans died by gunfire and nearly twice that many were treated in emergency rooms for nonfatal gunshot injuries. Health care costs related to gun injuries is estimated at several billion dollars annually - with much of the cost passed on to private health insurance subscribers and taxpayers.

No other consumer industry in the United States has been allowed to evade review of a product that causes so much social and economic harm.

Responsible Regulation: A History of Success

The history of consumer product regulation teaches that a significant number of deaths and injuries can be prevented by safety standards. More than 30 years ago, the United States made prevention of deaths from motor vehicle injuries a national priority. As a result, the death from motor vehicle crashes was cut nearly in half. An estimated quarter of a million deaths have been prevented. The same thing is possible with guns.

Reasonable Proposals

The public supports federal regulation of guns. A national survey conducted by NORC in 1999 found that 66 percent of Americans want the federal government to regulate the safety design of guns.

Over the past few years, legislation has been proposed in Congress to set basic consumer safety standards for guns through the Department of Justice, including:

- Minimum safety standards for the manufacture, design and distribution of guns
- Issue recalls and warnings about defective guns
- Collect data on gun-related death and injury
- Limit the sale of products when no other remedy is sufficient

Among the suggestions made for improved gun safety design are features that could make firearms less likely to be involved in an accident. Many guns lack so-called magazine disconnects, which disable the gun when its magazine is removed, or load indicators, which allow an individual to readily see whether the gun is loaded. Both of these features would address the most common scenario for unintentional shootings, involving a person who does not realize that there is still a round in a gun's chamber.

Senator John Corzine (D - NJ) had this to say about legislation he introduced to set safety standards for firearms, "Poorly manufactured, cheap quality guns pose a real threat to gun owners and the public. The absence of firearm safety standards means that many defective firearms remain in circulation. Under current law, we are powerless to recall defective guns or even require warning labels be attached to them. Today, toy guns are regulated, but real guns are not. That makes no sense. Even if my colleagues in the Congress cannot agree on much else when it comes to guns, surely we should all agree on this."*

* Office of Senator John S. Corzine, June 10, 2003.

Special thanks to the [Consumer Federation of America Foundation](#), and to the [North Carolina Consumers Council](#).

For More Information:
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