

Product Recalls

Federal Protections Have Failed

Every year, millions of unsafe products are recalled, but many remain on store shelves or in households long after federal warnings are issued. In the United States, consumer product recalls are governed at the federal level under the [Consumer Product Safety Act](#) of 1972, which created the [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission](#). Under this framework, the Consumer Product Safety Commission is responsible for identifying unsafe consumer products, coordinating recalls, and ensuring that manufacturers, importers, distributors, and retailers take corrective action.



However, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has long been criticized for its failure to implement recalls. Numerous federal audits and oversight reports, such as this [2020 report](#) published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), have found that the federal recall system frequently fails to meet accountability standards. For example, the GAO report found that only 61 percent of firms had submitted their progress reports “more than 75 percent of the time.” These audits further point to weak prioritization of high-risk cases, poor tracking of recall progress, and limited tools to ensure products are removed from stores.

California's Response

On September 29th, 2009, in response to longstanding problems in the federal recall system, California passed [AB 1860 \(Huffman\): Unsafe products: recall or warning](#), the Product Recall Safety and Protection Act. The law creates a state-level response system that kicks in the moment a recall or warning is triggered at the federal level or is issued voluntarily by a manufacturer. Under AB 1860, manufacturers, distributors, wholesalers, and retailers operating in California must act on recalls within extremely tight timelines or face state-level civil penalties of up to \$20,000 per single series of violations.

AB 1860 Needs an Update

However, while AB 1860 enhances consumer protection in California, the current program does not adequately account for all the costs incurred by the public due to product recalls. AB 1860, for example, does not track and charge all costs of returning recalled products to the manufacturer, nor does it reimburse local government for returning these products to the manufacturer.

This is a problem because recalled products often show up in collection programs and create a burden for solid waste facilities. Local government program operators responsible for household hazardous waste (HHW) frequently receive recalled products that present added risks and management costs, without any means of reimbursement from the entity responsible for the recall.

Consider, in 2025, Anker PowerCore-1000 power banks were recalled due to fire and burn hazards. Over 1.6 million units were affected, many of which were ultimately managed by locally operated facilities. These batteries required special handling, with return costs ranging from \$3.37 to \$4.20 per unit; costs that fell on facility operators, and ultimately to rate payers. This 1.6M units was almost half of the 3.4M lithium-ion battery related products recalled in 2025. In total, there were just under 25M total recalled units under 327 recalls that required refund and/or replacement, meaning these items were not repairable. Repairable items added another 9.1M units under 94 additional recalls.

Furthermore, product recalls occur regularly. A quick review of the Consumer Product Safety Commission's [recall database](#) reveals that new recalls are posted almost daily. Most of these recalled products ultimately become the responsibility of local governments and their solid waste and recycling facilities.

CPSC'S Proposed Legislation

Seventeen years after AB 1860's passage, recalled products continue to create public-safety risks and impose significant operational and financial burdens on local HHW facilities. Local governments routinely end up managing recalled items even though they were never meant to absorb these costs. In response, the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) is working to modernize the law.

Join CPSC's monthly Policy calls for regular updates.

Research & Relevant Articles

- [A Strategic Approach to Managing Product Recalls](#) – Harvard Business Review, 1996
- [Failures by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to Protect Consumers](#) - Senate Commerce Committee, 2019

Links

- [Report Unsafe Products](#)
- [Recall Database](#)