

Federal Agencies Focus on Multinational Product Safety Enforcement

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Within the last few months, the Obama Administration has followed through on its efforts to expand and strengthen international cooperation on product safety issues.

In September, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) hosted the First North American Consumer Product Summit with its counterpart consumer protection agencies from Canada (Health Canada) and Mexico (Profeco). During this two-day summit, leaders of all three agencies reaffirmed their historical working relationships and pledged to further their efforts to coordinate regulations, enforcement, product recalls, and consumer outreach. In a joint statement, the three agencies agreed to work together to “promote a global culture of safety for those who provide consumer products, to work together in the oversight of product supply chains that cross international borders, and to enable timely response by industry and governments to emerging product safety issues.” CPSC had previously signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with both foreign agencies and renewed its MOU with Profeco during the summit.

Also in September, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) signed agreements with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) aimed at improving the enforcement of environmental regulations and identifying potentially illegal imported goods. EPA and PHMSA will now participate in CBP's Import Safety Commercial Targeting and Analysis Center (CTAC). CTAC was created in 2009 to act as a centralized import enforcement coordination office for CBP, CPSC, the Food and Drug Administration and the Food Safety Inspection Service. The addition of EPA and PHMSA to this center is intended to enhance and expand inspection targeting for imports that are subject to one or more health and safety standards and to better identify illegal or non-compliant shipments.

The recent efforts of both CPSC and of EPA show that product safety agencies are continuing to expand their focus on the international aspects of their authority. Targeted inspection of imported products will likely continue to increase and enforcement efforts by the U.S. and its trading partners will continue to grow. Companies that import goods from foreign manufacturing facilities and companies that sell outside the U.S. alike should be aware of the government's increased scrutiny on these activities.