

Better Safe than Sorry

By Reg P. Wydeven
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The movie 'Tron: Legacy' is a box office smash. The film is a sequel to Disney's 1982 hit 'Tron', starring Jeff Bridges as computer hacker Kevin Flynn. In the flick, Flynn tries hacking into the mainframe of his former employer, ENCOM, and ends up getting transported into the digital world of the computer.

Once inside the mainframe, he teams up with Tron. The two of them use discs to fight evil "programs" called Recognizers and ultimately defeat the omnipotent Mast Control Program, sending Flynn back into the real world.

The movie naturally led to 'Tron: Deadly Discs,' a video game for the Atari 2600. As Tron, players battle endless waves of Recognizers with his disc. The summer the movie came out, our grocery store gave away Alpo Frisbees as part of a dog food promotion. It came as no surprise that we used the Frisbees as deadly discs, pretending we were Tron battling Recognizers. What is surprising is that none of us lost an eye or got a concussion after firing Frisbees at one another.

Had I gotten hurt, I may have considered filing a complaint with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, claiming my Alpo Frisbee was defective and caused my injury. Back in 1982, my complaint would not have been made public, and the CPSC would have investigated my claim. If the agency agreed with me and felt a recall was warranted, it would have negotiated with the Frisbee manufacturer about issuing one.

If I actually had filed a complaint, however, I'm guessing it would not have gotten very far. After all, hurling the Frisbee as a projectile at my buddies' noggins was probably not the manufacturer's intended use.

If my kids watch 'Tron: Legacy' and follow in their stupid father's footsteps by playing Deadly Discs with Frisbees, filing a complaint with the CPSC would be much different today than it was then.

As a result of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008, Congress mandated that the CPSC create an online, searchable database that would provide government safety data to consumers. On March 11, 2011, Saferproducts.gov, the website where the database will be located, will go live.

Once the site is up and running, consumers can go online to file a complaint about a product. Complainants must furnish 8 data points before a complaint is posted. Anonymous complaints will not be accepted. Once filed, the CPSC then has 5 days to review the complaint and forward it to the manufacturer. The manufacturer has 10 days to respond, then both the complaint and response will be posted online.

Manufacturers are obviously strongly opposed to the site and are even trying to mount legislation to change the process or block the database entirely. They claim that the CPSC does not guarantee that if complaints are materially inaccurate, they will not be posted. Companies fear that complaints may be about the wrong product, a counterfeit version or that the product was used improperly, like our Frisbees. They also assert that 10 days is not nearly enough time to investigate and respond to a complaint, especially if they do not have access to the product in question.

Consumer watchdog groups believe the database will provide valuable information to consumers more quickly than the CPSC ever has in the past. They feel this access is vital, especially after the massive recalls of toys with lead a few years back.

Looking back, I'm just glad 'Tron' didn't feature any weapons resembling lawn darts.

Go Pack!

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