

Trump nominates business ally to head Consumer Product Safety Commission

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President Donald Trump has picked Anne Marie Buerkle, a Republican from the state of New York, to head the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). Buerkle, a former nurse, congresswoman and attorney, has an extensive record of siding with corporations on product safety issues.

The CPSC is tasked with ensuring that consumer products are not unsafe or hazardous to people's health. The agency is charged with monitoring over 15,000 types of products, from children's clothing to toys, lawn mowers and all-terrain vehicles. The CPSC is responsible for enforcing safety regulations on products and ordering fines or recalls when necessary.

Buerkle was appointed as a commissioner to the agency in 2013 by President Barack Obama and became acting chairman in February 2017. Nominated by Trump in July, it is likely that Buerkle will be confirmed as CPSC chair by the Senate.

Just as Donald Trump and many in his administration, Buerkle is a proponent of "voluntary regulations." She spouts the corporate line that collaborating with manufacturers is the best way to regulate dangerous products, in lieu of fines or recalls. Buerkle maintains that safety is her top priority, but argues that the CPSC became too emotionally reactive under Obama.

In her time on the commission, Buerkle opposed limiting carbon monoxide emissions for portable generators, opposed requiring safety technology on table saws, and rejected imposing fines on companies that delayed reporting hazards to the CPSC, as required by law.

She has close ties to the industries over which she would have jurisdiction. She hired Patricia Hanz, an attorney for Briggs & Stratton Corp., as the CPSC's general counsel. Briggs & Stratton is the world's

largest producer of gasoline engines for power equipment and a leading maker of power generators. The corporation has been fighting the CPSC's requirement to reduce carbon monoxide emissions in portable generators.

Buerkle was the only commissioner who rejected a proposal to force manufacturers to cut carbon monoxide emissions, which are responsible for 849 non-fire deaths from 2005 through 2016, according to the CPSC.

She also voted against regulating the use of flame retardants--known to interfere with fetal development, alter brain function and raise the risk of cancer and reproductive problems--in clothing, furniture, electronics and other goods. At a September meeting where the commission was asked to limit the use of flame retardants, Buerkle voted "no."

In October, Buerkle was the only commissioner to vote against recalling all Zen Magnets--small magnets that, if swallowed by children, can cling together in the intestines and cut off blood flow. Buerkle indicated that she would support only a limited recall.

Along with Buerkle, Dana Baiocco is a nominee for a position on the CPSC. Baiocco, a former attorney, helped settle cases involving toys with lead paint, and represented Yamaha in lawsuits regarding rollovers of some of its off-road vehicles. The consumer agency reported nearly 60 fatalities, along with amputations and other injuries, involving three models of one of the company's vehicles.



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