

September 11, 2020

Mr. Jeff Bezos
CEO and Chairman
Amazon
410 Terry Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98109

Dear Mr. Bezos:

We write in response to a recent report that Amazon has ignored consumer safety complaints and continues to sell potentially hazardous AmazonBasics products that have been linked to fires, explosions, smoking, melting, and physical harm to consumers and their property.¹ As the manufacturer and retailer of AmazonBasics products—Amazon’s private and popular budget label line—Amazon must immediately stop selling any AmazonBasics products that are defective, notify consumers that are in possession of these products, and work with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to conduct swift and thorough recalls to remove these dangerous products from homes.

Yesterday, CNN released an investigative report based on many consumer complaints regarding the safety of AmazonBasics products, documenting Amazon’s failure to take action on these grave hazards. In one particular case, in 2017, Austin Parra of Connecticut was hospitalized with second-degree burns and throat injuries from breathing in smoke after his chair caught on fire, while he was sleeping, from a defective AmazonBasics USB cord. Similar consumer complaints of explosions, sparks, and fires are documented in Amazon product reviews about the AmazonBasics car charger, surge protector, paper shredder, microwave, phone charger, and batteries. As CNN reports, “[p]hone chargers were said to have burned peoples’ hands and legs, and exploding batteries allegedly sprayed chemicals in someone’s face.”²

Amazon’s response to personal harm and property damage has far too often been inaction and silence. While Amazon has removed some of these hazardous products from its platform,

¹Blake Ellis and Melanie Hicken, “Dozens of Amazon's own products have been reported as dangerous -- melting, exploding or even bursting into flames. Many are still on the market” *CNN* (Atlanta, Georgia), September. 10, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/10/business/amazonbasics-electronics-fire-safety-invs/index.html?utm_term=link&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twCNN&utm_content=2020-09-10T12%3A51%3A01.

² Ibid.

perhaps in response to CNN's investigation, far too many remain. In another case, Matt Citro purchased an AmazonBasics surge protector in January 2018, which caught flames and turned into a kind of "blowtorch." Faced with this clear warning sign of harm, Amazon simply offered a refund or replacement. Meanwhile over 40 other consumers reported similar incidents related to the same product. Due to the array and frequency, these mishaps can't simply be linked to user error.

Amazon's consumer notification and recall notice process also appears to be inadequate and underutilized. Such widespread and alarming reports demand a more vigilant safety response. According to CNN, neither the USB cable, in the case of Austin Parra, nor the surge protector, in the case of Matt Citro, have been recalled.³ Amazon has claimed that it will inform consumers of safety issues, but has only notified consumers about AmazonBasics product issues fewer than five times.⁴ Amazon has also failed to share how they will inform the public about how the company is handling these kinds of consumer complaints. These products will continue to pose an ongoing threat to consumers that have already purchased these products until they are recalled.

Amazon must immediately stop the sale of dangerous and defective AmazonBasics products, recall them, and effectively and immediately notify consumers of potential risks. It is simply not enough to delete a products retail listing page, leaving behind a dead URL and removing these consumer warnings from view. There is no excuse for purchasers of these products not to be immediately notified about consumer safety issues, since Amazon has contact information for all of its consumers. Amazon should also conduct an internal analysis of the steps the company has so far taken to determine why the company has failed to protect consumers.

Consumers must be provided with more information about the safety of AmazonBasics products at the time of sale. Amazon has claimed that products that have not been removed from the platform meet applicable safety certifications. However, if these products did sufficiently meet safety standards, these products would not be blowing up and catching on fire. AmazonBasics products should prominently and publicly indicate which safety certifications these products receive at the point of sale.

Amazon must prioritize consumer safety over sales, particularly as consumers turn to online marketplaces during the coronavirus pandemic. As we wrote in August 2019, Amazon urgently needs to take further steps to protect consumers from defective products that persist on its online marketplace. We are shocked and appalled that Amazon has again failed to prevent the sale of dangerous products, this time as the manufacturer of the AmazonBasics brand bearing full responsibility.

Given the significant risk to consumers, we request information on what steps Amazon is taking to protect consumers from avoidable harm, including answers to the following questions:

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

- What AmazonBasics products have been taken off the market due to defects or safety issues? Have these products been recalled? Have consumers that have previously purchased these products been notified?
- Does Amazon suspend the sale of AmazonBasics products when they are investigating safety issues?
- How does Amazon use complaints to trigger safety investigations? How many complaints and reviews related to product safety must occur before Amazon begins an investigation or suspends a product? When Amazon does respond to consumer reviews, what steps are taken and how quickly? Please provide information regarding the handling of the USB cable and surge protectors identified as defective by CNN.
- What is Amazon's process for consumers that need to file product safety complaints on AmazonBasics products? Are these complaints reviewed and responded to by a human in every case?
- Has Amazon deleted a product listing page over defect or safety concerns, but not issued a recall?
- When Amazon deletes a product listing page due to a defect or safety issues, does Amazon always notify consumers? Does Amazon consider deleting a product listing page as adequate notification to consumers?
- Under Section 15 of the Consumer Product Safety Act, manufacturers and retailers have a legal obligation to report products that are defective and pose unreasonable risk to consumers to the CPSC. Does Amazon report all of this information to the CPSC?⁵
- Since my previous letter to Amazon, in August 2019, what concrete steps have you taken to reduce consumers from risks related to products sold on your platform?

We respectfully request a written response to these questions and to outline the steps Amazon is taking to remove these products from its marketplace and from consumers' homes by October 11, 2020.

Sincerely,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate


ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senate


EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senate

⁵U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, *Duty to Report to the CPSC Your Rights and Responsibilities*, <https://www.cpsc.gov/Business--Manufacturing/Recall-Guidance/Duty-to-Report-to-the-CPSC-Your-Rights-and-Responsibilities>.