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Transcript  
Interview with Steve Liebmann, 2UE  
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E&OE

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*Subjects: Product safety web site.*

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**LIEBMANN:** You often hear, you know, about product safety recalls in the news. In fact I'll have news of another vehicle product safety recall involving Toyota before we go off air this morning. But we hear about products safety recalls, kids' pyjamas with wrong fire safety labels - that was a recent one - contaminated food, furniture defects or dangerous electrical equipment. But the thing is that until now there's not been anywhere that we can look to find out what dangerous or dodgy products are out there. Well now the ACCC has today unveiled a national internet-based one stop shop via a new website. Now the website is all lower case; [productsafety.gov.au](http://productsafety.gov.au) and it's a service that the ACCC says could very well help save lives. Our Federal Consumer Affairs Minister Dr Craig Emerson is on the line to tell us about that.

Dr Emerson, good morning to you.

**EMERSON:** Good morning to you Steve. Before we get onto it, that's great news about Costco isn't it?

**LIEBMANN:** It certainly is.

**EMERSON:** We're trying to get more competition in grocery retailing and they've got pretty ambitious plans to expand even further so that's more choice for consumers.

**LIEBMANN:** I thought it was somewhat hypocritical of some of the bigger shopping centre owners trying to stop them.

**EMERSON:** Well that's right and this is what we've found with planning and zoning laws - some of the incumbents abuse those planning and zoning laws to try to stop competition coming into grocery retailing and so that they can basically run the show themselves.

Well that game's up as far as we're concerned. We're working with the states including NSW Government to open up somewhat the planning and zoning the laws. Of course we need them for traffic management and environmental amenity but they really shouldn't be there just to protect an incumbent, often a very big incumbent, against competition.

**LIEBMANN:** Well I hope Costco, and I have no particular interest or brief for them, but for the sake of the little person I hope Costco put a rocket up the competition.

**EMERSON:** Well me too and Aldi is also expanding dramatically in Australia now too.

**LIEBMANN:** All right, now this website. It aims to protect the public against dodgy products and services. Tell us about how it's set up.

**EMERSON:** I've spent the morning using the website. It's basically bringing all of the information that's been assembled over the last 20 years into one location on the website that you just described to your listeners. So they can look up those products which may be – have been - dodgy, and have been recalled. But just as important, Steve, there are products that of themselves are not unsafe but if you adopt particular practices, if you like, then they can be unsafe. I'll give you an example. You'd think blind and curtain cords were just a normal part of everyday life. Well, 15 children, since the early 1990s, have lost their lives because of those. And on the website, there's a little icon you can click to find out how to fit a device on those curtain cords and blind cords to minimise the risk of injury to kids.

**LIEBMANN:** Okay so it details what's safe and what's not safe but it also tells you what to look out for in new purchases and how to use products safely?

**EMERSON:** That's right. Another example is car jacks. The blokes, they're at home and they get under the under the car to have a look. There has been a surprisingly large number of accidents in relation to car jacks, so it's got information about how to use those safely.

Ladders - unfortunately the blokes again have a habit of falling off ladders - and not using them safely. Things like prams and strollers – again, seemingly innocuous but every year just in one state 200 children under five are injured in prams and strollers.

**LIEBMANN:** So it's a two-way flow of information, I'll be able to make enquiries and I'll be able to receive information about dodgy products?

**EMERSON:** Yes you can, in fact all you need to do is log on and leave your email address and you'll automatically receive that information.

**LIEBMANN:** So you just register for these updates?

**EMERSON:** Yep, that's it.

**LIEBMANN:** Okay, and it's up and running now?

**EMERSON:** Right now. And you know, I'm not going to pretend I put it together, I didn't. The ACCC did, and I just think it's a really good service to consumers. And we're modernising our product safety laws at the same time, through a big legislative change that we're getting through the parliament. Up until fairly recently, Steve, one state might find a dodgy product and could take weeks for other states to get onto it.

A few years ago there were Bindy Beads - these little things that kids were eating and hallucinating. I think they were first found in NSW and it took about three weeks for the other states to get onto it. Under the new system that information will be disseminated immediately through the ACCC, not only to the other states but also to the consumers.

**LIEBMANN:** That's great, but tell me, why did it take four years to set up because the Productivity Commission was recommending this be done four years ago?

**EMERSON:** Yeah, well that's true, and that's fair criticism. We've been in government for two and the ACCC has been working on it for a while obviously. But I just think it's a pretty impressive effort now and you don't want to put these things up and do it not well. It's comprehensive and even where some of the responsibilities are not the ACCC's, instead of saying oh this is our silo, we're not say, involved in car recalls which you mentioned in your introduction...

**LIEBMANN:** Yeah.

**EMERSON:** ...there's a link directly to those. So you just don't have to be some sort of genius ...all the links are there.

**LIEBMANN:** Okay, now look I can't let you go without mentioning the fact that today you make the tough boss rogue gallery in the Daily Telegraph this morning which suggests you've lost 75 per cent of your staff. Are you too demanding as a boss?

**EMERSON:** Well I think the staff would say no, but I've got a couple of them sitting beside here. I've got - no, one thumb up and one thumb down.

**LIEBMANN:** Oh right.

**EMERSON:** What's happened Steve in my case, one press sec, he's a great guy, but he needed to go back to Queensland because he was spending all that time in Canberra. He had a little baby and his wife expected him to spend more time with the baby and the

family and I thought that was fair enough. He thought that he should do that. That wasn't any dissatisfaction with me. But what it does do is it highlights the fact that Canberra is an unusual job. You know, people from all over Australia having to go to Canberra, not only when Parliament's sitting but when it's not. They are often away from their families and this takes a toll. By the way, I'm not making a political point here. It takes a toll on both government and opposition staff. There'll be high turnover in the opposition as well.

**LIEBMANN:** All right, well keep the whip in the cupboard.

**EMERSON:** [Laughs]. Okay.

**LIEBMANN:** Good on you.

**EMERSON:** Thanks for you time. That's the Federal Minister for consumer affairs, Doctor Craig Emerson.

**ENDS**