



Products Liability

Torts
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Important note:

Products Liability

There are three paths to products liability (a plaintiff can use any or all).

- Strict products liability
- Negligence
- Breach of warranty (UCC Article 2)

Important note:

Products Liability

There are three paths to products liability (a plaintiff can use any or all).

- **Strict products liability**
 - Our current topic
- **Negligence**
 - We already covered this
- **Breach of warranty (UCC Article 2)**
 - Not covered in this course

Negligence

- Duty of care owed to plaintiff
- Breach of duty
- Actual causation
- Proximate causation
- Injury (Damages)

STRICT LIABILITY

- Duty of care
- **Absolute duty of safety**
- No duty

- Actual causation
- Proximate causation
- Injury (Damages)

Strict Products Liability

- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?

Negligence

- Duty of care owed to plaintiff
- Breach of duty
- Actual causation
- Proximate causation
- Injury (Damages)

Strict Products Liability

- **sold or supplied product**
- **defect exists**
- Actual causation
- Proximate causation
- Injury (Damages)

Strict Products Liability

- **sold or supplied product**
- **defect exists**
- Act **“Unchanged condition”?**
- Proximate causation
- Injury (Damages)

Strict Products Liability

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This issue is covered in upcoming slides ...

Strict Products Liability



• **sold or supplied product**

• **defect exists**

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sold or supplied product

- manufacturer
- wholesaler
- retailer
- anywhere in the vertical distribution chain suffices
- but casual sellers are not included

sold or supplied

??????

a local car dealer, for a car it sold

- yes

an American subsidiary of an overseas automaker, where the subsidiary buys cars from the maker and sells them to local dealers, for a car ultimately sold to a consumer

- yes

your neighbor running a garage sale, for a used blender sold to a random person

- no

a consumer website that recommended a model of washing machine, for that washing machine

- no

product

- a tangible item created by humans to be commercially sold/distributed
 - includes food
 - even served in a restaurant!

product

???????

an automobile

- yes

a portable space heater

- yes

a cup of coffee at the donut shop

- yes

life insurance

- no

carpeting installed in your home

- yes

Strict Products Liability

• sold or supplied product



• defect exists

- Actual causation
- Proximate causation
- Injury (Damages)

defect exists

What's a defect?

It's something that makes the product **unreasonably dangerous** to the user/consumer (including their property).

defect exists

Some key issues to consider:

- How to classify the defect?
- Is a relevant test satisfied for the existence of defect?
- Did the product reach the defendant in essentially unchanged condition?

defect exists

- **Is a relevant test satisfied for the existence of a defect?**
 - Different courts may recognize or require different tests.
 - But the straightforward regular approach would be that the plaintiff can choose any relevant test, and so long as that test is satisfied, the plaintiff has proven the existence of a product defect.

defect exists

- **Did the product reach the defendant in essentially unchanged condition?**
 - Some courts list this as a separate element.
 - In my view, f.w.i.w., listing this as an element is needless.
 - It is true that the defect must have existed in the product when the product was sold or supplied by the defendant for the defendant to be liable. That's properly considered part of the "defect exists" element.
 - It is also true that if someone modified the product such that it was the modification and not the defect that injured the plaintiff, then that's an issue for causation (actual or proximate, as appropriate).

defect exists

- **Did the product reach the defendant in essentially unchanged condition? (continued)**
 - Where included as a separate element, “reached the plaintiff in essentially unchanged condition” might give the defendant a way to win that has nothing to do with whether the defect existed at the time of defendant’s supply or with causation. (See, e.g., *Lakey v. Sta-Rite*.)
 - Either way – whether you think of this as a separate element or a possible issue under the elements of existence of a defect, actual causation, and proximate causation, it’s a question you should think about when you analyze a potential product defect claim.

defect exists

- **How to classify the defect?**
 - E.g., manufacturing, design, warning
 - In analyzing a product defect claim, it’s a good idea to try to determine how to categorize the defect involved (or defects, if more than one).
 - As a conceptual matter, classifying the defect in this way shouldn’t be necessary to deciding whether a good claim exists, but some courts may expect it, and it can be helpful in understanding what tests can be used.

defect exists

kinds of

defect

- manufacturing defects
- design defects
- warning defects

defect exists

tests

defect

- consumer expectations test
 - esp. for manufacturing and design defects
- risk-utility test
 - esp. for design defects
- reasonable under circumstances to avoid danger
 - esp. for warning defects

example

**Takata
airbags**



Strict Products Liability

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example

Takata airbags

Is there a good claim for strict products liability?

- A. Yes
- B. No

Strict Products Liability

- **sold or supplied product**

- **defect exists**

- Actual causation
- Proximate causation
- Injury (Damages)

Tomorrow
Temp 

**HOME
HANGAR**





