

Perils OF Global Warnings

By ACSH Staff — December 10, 2007

They've finally gotten what they've asked for and it isn't pretty.

The activist groups, plaintiff's bar, and complicit legislators have created an environment where "Sesame Street" is deemed inappropriate for children, restaurants are forced to protect themselves with Omnibus Warning Labels, and California's Proposition 65 requires cancer warnings on artificial Christmas trees.

This holiday season began with the most ironic warning of all: labels on DVDs of vintage "Sesame Street" cautioned some episodes may not be appropriate for ... children.

Yes, you read that right. With Oscar the Grouch's untreated depression and Cookie Monster gorging toward diabetes, it was feared children might get the wrong message. The warning label must have been brought to you by the letter "A" as in "absurd."

But it gets worse.

True, those allergic to peanuts and other allergens face real challenges, especially when eating out just the smallest exposure may trigger a serious and potentially fatal reaction. But I was only joking when I once said the safest course for a seller might be to warn potential buyers (a.k.a. "future plaintiffs") that "everything" sold may be dangerous. Well, it's not just a joke. Dunkin' Donuts, more for its protection than ours, is warning patrons that "any of our products may contain allergens, including peanuts."

When I showed this warning to a friend with a food allergy, she expressed frustration that it gave her no useful information. "I'm supposed to avoid "everything" they sell, because it "may" contain "any" allergen?" she asked incredulously. Who would have thought Dunkin' Donuts would one-up McDonald's' infamous "hot coffee" warning label? But given fear of laws and lawsuits, can you blame Dunkin' Donuts?

And just in time for the holidays, the National Christmas Tree Association is claiming some artificial trees containing low levels of lead require what is known as a Proposition 65 warning label, stating "this product contains a substance known to cause cancer or birth defects." Never mind that artificial trees, even with lead, pose absolutely no risk of cancer or birth defects (unless children eat entire forests of artificial trees). One real danger from trees, by contrast, is the fire risk. Ironically, in 2003, activists in California scared the legislature into banning certain flame retardants, making prevention of such fires more expensive.

Those green Californians who thought they were saving the world by not cutting down live trees reusing the same artificial tree each year will be awfully confused if they see warnings on their environmentally-correct faux-trees. Today, as a result of political correctness, fear of litigation, and

widespread (unfounded) fear of trace levels of chemicals, warning labels now serve the public in theory only. Because they're everywhere, these warnings have been rendered meaningless.

We are all the worse for it.

This piece first appeared in the [\[1\]Washington Times](#) ^[1].

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