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Hoverboard 'bursts into flames' in Cary. What you need to know

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For one Cary family, a hot new Christmas toy was too hot. A "hoverboard," a type of trendy expensive hands-free scooter (that, for the record, doesn't actually hover,) caught fire in their home Sunday, five days after their teenager's boyfriend purchased the device for \$427 at a Crabtree Valley Mall kiosk.



"It starts to smoke and shake and kind of swell up," the teenager's mother recalls. "And all of a sudden, it ignites, it bursts into flames."

While the family was able to put out the blaze with a fire extinguisher ("it kept smoking for twenty minutes"), it was only because they were right there when it ignited, she says.

“My fear is that people have these wrapped underneath a tree,” she says, adding that her insurance company, Erie Insurance Group, is investigating.

They aren't alone.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has been investigating incidents across the country where the devices apparently ignited. Reports of the devices causing fires are so prevalent that they inspired a “Saturday Night Live” skit.

Kirk Warner, an attorney with Smith Anderson in Raleigh, focuses on product liability law. He says that while a gift giver wouldn't likely be liable for a fire caused by a hoverboard, other parties could be – such as the manufacturer.

“One of their duties is to monitor their products in the field,” he explains, adding that manufacturers have to assess consumer reports and respond accordingly.

Typically retailers themselves can use a “sealed container defense.” As the hoverboards come in boxes, it's unlikely that a retailer can inspect each and every device, he explains. But a very real liability could be you, the hoverboard owner.

“If you hurt someone because you didn't exercise reasonable care in operation ... you're obviously going to be subject to lawsuits,” he says.

With any purchase, the consumer needs to weight the risks, Warner warns, adding: “Anything that plugs into anything is a potential heat source.”

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Crabtree Valley Mall suspended sales of hoverboards this week in response to the incident.

The mall is requiring the vendor, SimC LLC, which has been selling under the name Airboards, to continue to staff the booth at Crabtree Valley Mall “in case anyone has any questions,” says Brian Asbill, a Crabtree

spokesman. Asbill says hoverboards were the only product being sold at that kiosk, but the vendor has been a longtime tenant, selling multiple products over the years.

A "retail fanshop" under the name "SIMC LLC" filed incorporation papers with the state of North Carolina in 2010 and lists Sibel Ilgin Celik as its manager. Messages left at the number in the incorporation filing and also at the number provided by Crabtree, were not returned Wednesday.

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