

# Woman sues company over injury from leash.

*Courts: The plaintiff says the product is dangerous; the maker says the label carries warnings.; General News*

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One minute, Nancy Jodoin was holding her dog on a retractable cord leash while watching her daughter play softball. An instant later, she was on the ground, the tips of three fingers severed from her left hand by the cord when her 75-pound Labrador retriever suddenly ran toward some people it knew.

Jodoin remembers the pain was "like fireworks coming out the tips of my fingers."

In a lawsuit filed Monday in federal court in Eugene, Jodoin is seeking an unspecified payment, alleging that the manufacturer, distributor and seller of the leash were negligent and that their product is defective and dangerous.

But company officials said the leashes come with safety warnings and that accidents such as Jodoin's are uncommon.

"We are sorry to see this happen. It's very unfortunate," said Don Cowan, spokesman for the San Diego-based Petco Animal Supplies Inc., seller of the leash. "It is very, very rare."

Jodoin's accident is the only one he is aware of in the past five years, he said.

Also named in the suit are the manufacturer of the Flexi Classic 3-5 retractable cord leash, Bogdahn Technik of Germany, and the distributor, Flexi USA Inc. of Cincinnati.

Jodoin said she had no idea she was at risk from a dog leash.

"It was quick. I really couldn't tell you exactly how it happened," she said. "The snap happened, and it was over. It cut through bone. Three bones. No one would have thought."

She wants the retractable cord leashes off the market.

"I don't want anyone else to have a tragic accident like mine," Jodoin said, standing on the exact spot where the injury happened last April 6 near the softball field behind Corridor Elementary School in north Eugene.

**Scott Lucas**, a lawyer with the Eugene firm of Johnson Clifton Larson & Corson representing Jodoin, said the companies named in the lawsuit offer safer - but more expensive - retractable

leashes that use a wide webbed belt instead of a tough, narrow nylon cord.

"There are safer alternatives on the market that are made by this company," Lucas said. "We know of five incidents where fingers have been amputated."

The president of Flexi USA Inc. said that while he's sorry that Jodoin was injured, product information supplied with the leashes clearly warns consumers not to wrap the cord around fingers, hands or other body parts.

The product's literature carries a list of warnings and specifically states that fingers can be cut off if they become entangled in the nylon cord, he said.

"The wording on the back of the package specifically says don't touch the cord, don't let it become wrapped around you or any part of your body," said Ken Humpert, president of Flexi USA Inc.

Retractable cord leashes have been available for 20 years and are more popular than the newer retractable leashes that employ a web belt, Humpert said.

"We sell both products," he said. "The majority of people choose the cord leash. They like it better. People have to follow directions and take heed of the warnings. We say that on the product."

Lucas said a dog leash ought not require the same consumer vigilance as, for example, a power saw or other product that's intrinsically dangerous.

Since the incident, Jodoin has had to leave her job as an executive secretary for a publishing company where she worked 27 years. Today, a year after the injury, she said she feels constant pain in her fingertips.

Jodoin shows where the loop of nylon cord wrapped around her fingers when her dog bolted, severing three of her fingertips.

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