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Apr 8, 2009 1:46 pm US/Eastern

## Women Claim Victoria Secret Bras Irritated Skin

NEW ORLEANS (CBS) — Women in several states claim Victoria's Secret bras gave them rashes and other skin problems, and a group of lawyers sought Wednesday to consolidate their cases against the lingerie chain.

Federal lawsuits filed in Louisiana, Florida, New Jersey and New York accuse Victoria's Secret and its parent company, Limited Brands Inc., of negligently designing undergarments and misrepresenting the safety of their products.

Limited Brands has assured customers that Victoria's Secret bras are safe.

New Yorker Roberta Ritter bought a bra from the Victoria's Secret "Very Sexy" line, but there's nothing sexy about what she says happened next.

Ritter is suing the lingerie giant claiming the "Very Sexy Extreme Me Push-Up" and "Angel's Secret Embrace" bras she bought caused painful rashes and burns on her chest.

"It hurt, it actually hurt. It was like the patches were so dry it was like sandpaper. It burned," she said.

She maintains the bras contained a chemical – suspected to be formaldehyde – and that led to her break-out.

"Some people can have allergies to formaldehyde or formaldehyde resin, and typically you would see this as a rash in areas around the bra or around the waistband, areas where there is close contact," says Dermatologist Dr. Doris Day.

"It was itching, and it was welts," says Ritter. "And it was the shape of a bra and it was just bizarre."

And Ritter isn't the only customer to get sick.

"I was trying hydrocortisone creams, Benadryl, antihistamines, anything over the counter to try and stop this itch," said Victoria's Secret customer Vicki Kulos.

"I thought I had spider bites all over my chest. I quit wearing the bras and it went away eventually," added Melissa Yacoulo, also affected by the bras.

Dozens of other women have also complained about similar rashes and breakouts on the Web site MedHelp.org.

In response to the complaints and the alleged chemical contamination, Victoria's Secret had this to say:

"We have strict quality controls around our products and we do not use formaldehyde in our bras.



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A Victoria's Secret customer has filed a lawsuit after she claims she came down with a serious rash due to a bra she bought from the store. CBS

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Customer safety and satisfaction are always our primary concerns, and we take very seriously any issues our customers may have with our products."

Dr. Day says formaldehyde resins are often added to make clothes more wrinkle-resistant. Formaldehyde is a preservative found in many products; at elevated levels, it can irritate skin.

"When you heat the bras by putting it in the dryer, it releases the resins embedded in the fabric," said plaintiffs' attorney Daniel Becnel Jr., whose Reserve, La.-based law firm filed both the consolidation petition and a lawsuit on behalf of a Baton Rouge woman.

Wednesday's petition is limited to four cases already pending in federal courts, but plaintiffs' lawyers said they are prepared to file more than 600 other cases once the panel rules on their bid to consolidate the litigation.

Jerilyn Amaya, 66, of West Palm Beach, Fla., one of the four plaintiffs, said the bras she wore gave her a "horrible rash" and hives.

"It kept burning and itching. I finally stopped wearing the bras," she said. "It disappeared, but it still burns every once in a while."

The petition, filed Wednesday with the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation, asks that the cases be heard together by a federal judge in Baton Rouge, La. The Washington, D.C., panel didn't immediately act on the request.

Limited Brands says Victoria Secret does not add formaldehyde to its bras, and it says independent tests show the bras are formaldehyde-free or have only small traces of the chemical that wouldn't cause any health problems.

"Millions of women love Victoria's Secret bras," Limited Brands spokeswoman Tammy Roberts Myers said in a statement. "We have strict quality controls around our products, and we do not use formaldehyde in our bras. Customer safety and satisfaction are always our primary concerns, and we take very seriously any issues our customers may have with our products."

Becnel also represents Gulf Coast hurricane victims who sued the Federal Emergency Management Agency, claiming they were exposed to potentially hazardous levels of formaldehyde fumes while living in government-issued trailers after hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

Hundreds of claims against FEMA and trailer manufacturers were consolidated in New Orleans. The first case, against Gulf Stream Coach Inc., is scheduled to be tried in September.

Patricia Williams, a toxicologist who has served as an expert witness for the plaintiffs in the FEMA trailer litigation, also has been hired by plaintiffs' lawyers to evaluate the health claims of Victoria's Secret customers.

"This is not a little clothing rash," Williams said. "The extent and severity of it is just unbelievable. Many of them have scars that seem to be permanent."

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