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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

Sunbeam Pressure Cooker Severely Burned Woman, Jury Told

By **David Minsky**

Law360, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (February 9, 2026, 5:22 PM EST) -- A woman told a Florida federal jury Monday that a defective Sunbeam Products Inc. pressure cooker caused severe burns to her arm after removing the lid, urging the court to hold the company responsible for her injuries.

Representing Shirley Johnson in Fort Lauderdale federal court, Eric T. Chaffin of Chaffin Luhana LLP told jurors during opening statements that Sunbeam and parent company Newell Brands Inc. should be held liable for causing his client's injuries because the companies' product caused her burns and continued selling defective pressure cookers despite knowledge of a design defect.

Johnson, a 52-year-old Air Force veteran from Texas, initially brought her lawsuit to Palm Beach County state court in June 2023, although the complaint was removed to federal court the following month. She alleges strict liability, negligence and breach of warranty.

"It's a rather simple case. It's a case about a faulty pressure cooker that opened under pressure and burned Shirley. The cooker was not only faulty, but the defendants knew it was faulty and they kept selling it," Chaffin said.

Speaking to a jury of seven women and one man, Chaffin said Johnson was using the Sunbeam cooker in May 2020. While using the pressure cooker, described as a Sunbeam "six-quart express crock multi-cooker," Johnson heard the beep on the device and believed it was finished cooking, Chaffin said. Johnson was present in the courtroom.

After trying to open the pressure cooker two times, Chaffin said his client unplugged the device then tried a third time, and the lid came off, forcing the scalding hot contents out under pressure. Johnson suffered burns on her right arm and hand, and on one of her toes, according to Chaffin.

Jurors were told that Johnson, who was trained to be diligent and careful while working on radars in the Air Force, had waited several minutes to let the pressure cooker cool down before each opening attempt.

Years earlier, in 2017, Chaffin said Sunbeam began receiving multiple incident reports and hired an outside forensics company to investigate the problem. The investigation determined the pressure cooker's locking pin was defective, allowing the lid to be removed while still under pressure.

A design process began in May 2018, although the defendants never disclosed the defect and continued selling units, Chaffin said, adding that Sunbeam's assurance that its product is safe "for total piece of mind" was false.

David J. O'Connell of Goldberg Segalla LLP, representing the defendants, told jurors that Johnson had previously used a similar product several times in the past, but ignored instructions and warnings.

"She knew how to operate it," O'Connell said. "She said she read the instructions, she said she'd follow them carefully."

O'Connell said that Sunbeam rigorously tested its products before they went to market. In this case, the company reached out to a trusted manufacturer in China that had been making multi-cookers for years and selected a base model that had been in use since 2007, according to O'Connell.

Once an exterior design was figured out, O'Connell said Sunbeam put the multi-cooker through several rounds of safety design in order to meet certain required specifications for kitchen appliances.

Sunbeam pays an outside company to evaluate its products to ensure the safety standards are met and evaluated for defects, producing a larger quantity of prototypes that are tested during each step of the process, O'Connell said.

"They literally go through them part by part," O'Connell said. "Obviously Sunbeam does not want anyone hurt by their products."

The plaintiff is represented by Bruno Renda of Kelley | Uustal and by Eric T. Chaffin and Steven D. Cohn of Chaffin Luhana LLP.

The defendants are represented by Jennifer A. McLoone of Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP and by David J. O'Connell of Goldberg Segalla LLP.

The case is Shirley Johnson v. Sunbeam Products Inc. et al., case number 9:23-cv-81022, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida.

--Editing by Amy Rowe.

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