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Sunbeam Sold Exploding Pressure Cookers, Fla. Jury Told

By **David Minsky**

Law360, Fort Lauderdale, Fla. (May 26, 2026, 11:44 PM EDT) -- Three individuals are seeking to hold Sunbeam Products Inc. and its parent company liable for serious burn injuries caused by exploding pressure cooker lids, telling a Florida federal jury Tuesday that the company continued selling a defective product without alerting the public.

Representing customers Malcolm Fuller, Lacey Hall and Ashley Boladeres, Eric T. Chaffin of Chaffin Luhana LLP told a jury during opening statements in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, that Sunbeam and Newell Brands Inc. continued to sell defective Crock-Pot electric pressure cookers without adequately warning consumers of the faulty lid locking mechanism.

"This case is about a defective pressure cooker that defendants Newell and Sunbeam knew was defective, and they continued to sell it," Chaffin said, adding that the company downplayed the defects after quietly redesigning the locking mechanism following consumer complaints. "When attorneys get involved, problems become improvements, explosions become boil-overs."

Fuller brought a June 2023 complaint against the defendants in Palm Beach County state court. His lawsuit was transferred to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida the following July. Hall and Boladeres each sued the defendants in Florida federal court in November 2023, and U.S. District Judge Melissa Damian consolidated the lawsuits in March.

Hall, a Michigan resident, claimed in her lawsuit that she was using the defendants' pressure cooker to prepare food in October 2019, when the device "exploded" without warning. After the lid detached, Hall alleged the cooker's scalding hot contents flew out and landed on her young daughter.

The daughter, who has Down syndrome, was severely burned on one side of her face and rushed to the hospital, Chaffin said Tuesday. A courtroom TV displayed pictures of the daughter's injuries. Citing a comment from his client, Chaffin said the daughter's "face is melting off."

One female juror became visibly upset upon seeing the pictures, causing her to grimace, breathe heavily and rapidly blink her eyes.

Chaffin played a video to jurors depicting engineers testing a pressure cooker for defects. The lid detached, causing hot contents to flow out. Immediately afterward, one engineer in the background could be heard saying "holy shit!"

Instead of building and designing a custom pressure cooker, Chaffin said Sunbeam and Newell chose to have a Chinese company manufacture a generic model in 2016. The product went to market in July 2017, and months later, in December 2017, Sunbeam and Newell were put on notice when they started receiving incident reports about the locking mechanism, according to Chaffin.

In February 2018, Chaffin said, a root-cause analysis was completed, and the companies redesigned the pressure cooker to have stronger brackets and locking pins. By July 2018, the companies began releasing the new pressure cookers, but continued to sell from their remaining inventory at least 30,000 of the devices with no improvements, the attorney said.

The companies added updated consumer advisories to their product, although Chaffin said "warnings aren't a substitute for a lock." Chaffin added that the defendants tried blaming consumers for

misusing their product and not following instructions.

David J. O'Connell of Goldberg Segalla LLP, who represents the defendants, told jurors Sunbeam was in the process of creating its own pressure cooker model when those plans were scrapped after Newell acquired the company in 2016. The defendants went with a trusted manufacturer in China instead, according to O'Connell.

The pressure cooker design underwent developments in various stages of production, O'Connell said, with the manufacturer building several pressure cookers in each phase production and subjecting them to testing before approving the model for mass production.

After receiving customer complaints, O'Connell said the companies called a crisis management team to investigate. Complaints were varied and not consistent, he added.

O'Connell said investigators couldn't open the pressure cooker lids by hand, so they resorted to finding a way to defeat the locking mechanisms through "abuse testing," out of concern that consumers were forcing the lids open.

As a result of testing, O'Connell told jurors, Sunbeam and Newell redesigned the pressure cookers by switching the brackets from aluminum to steel, lengthened the locking pin, and made other improvements, and the new product was sent back to third-party testers to ensure it met specifications.

Based on what Sunbeam found during its investigation, O'Connell said the company believed consumers weren't following instructions.

O'Connell cited Lacey Hall's statements following her lawsuit, including her fuzzy recollection of certain details while using the pressure cooker. O'Connell said Hall remembered reading the user manual, although she said nothing important stood out and that Hall discarded the manual.

O'Connell said the plaintiffs' complaints each involved separate incidents with separate products, but urged jurors to consider the facts separately.

"This is a unique circumstance," O'Connell said. "We are here to try three separate lawsuits together. These plaintiffs want you to treat these as the same case. They're not."

The customers are represented by Eric T. Chaffin and Steven D. Cohn of Chaffin Luhana LLP, and John J. Uustal and Bruno Renda of Kelley Uustal.

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

The case is Fuller et al. v. Sunbeam Products Inc. et al., case number 9:23-cv-81024, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida.

--Editing by Lakshna Mehta.

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