

[Products Liability Law Daily Wrap Up, TOP STORY—JURY VERDICTS— E.D.Tex.: Jury awards \\$1.1M in Sunbeam space heater case on design defect issue, \(Sept. 8, 2021\)](#)

Products Liability Law Daily Wrap Up

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By Leah S. Poniatowski, J.D.

The jury found the manufacturer at fault for third-degree burns sustained by a consumer when the heater did not shut off after tipping over.

A federal jury in Texas found that Sunbeam Products, Inc. was liable for damages arising from a design defect in its Model SQH310 space heater after the device failed to shut off when it tipped over, which caused a consumer serious injury from burns after she became immobilized against the device. The jury awarded her \$1.1 million in total for her past and future physical pain, mental anguish, disfigurement, and physical impairment ([Nelson v. Sunbeam Products, Inc.](#), September 2, 2021, Mazzant, A.).

A consumer was seriously burned following the use of a Sunbeam Space Heater, Model SQH310. According to her [complaint](#), the heater was operating in her sleeping area in her mobile home. She had woken up on a January morning while it was still dark and fell to the floor after feeling light-headed. Unfortunately, she tipped the heater over when she fell, and the grill of the heater pressed against her back. Because the device did not shut off when it tipped over, the hot surface of the heater seared the consumer's back, causing third-degree burns and related injuries.

In her complaint, the consumer alleged that Sunbeam was liable for her past and future injuries as a result of defective design, defective manufacture, negligence, and breach of warranties. She asserted that safer alternative designs existed for each defect in the heater and that the alternative designs were technically and economically feasible. She requested a jury trial and sought damages for her injuries, including medical care expenses, loss of earning capacity, physical impairment, physical pain, mental anguish, and disfigurement.

Jury verdict. The jury determined that there was a design defect in the device and that the consumer was not negligent with respect to the cause of her injuries. The jury considered eight elements of the consumer's injuries separately when determining damages. They awarded the consumer \$300,000 for past physical pain, \$150,000 for future physical pain, \$150,000 for past mental anguish, \$150,000 for future mental anguish, \$100,000 for past disfigurement, \$75,000 for future disfigurement, \$100,000 for past physical impairment, and \$75,000 for future physical impairment, which totaled \$1.1 million.

The case is No. [4:19-CV-263](#).

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Companies: Sunbeam Products, Inc. d/b/a Jarden Consumer Solutions

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