

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Monday, October 24, 2005

## **Parents of Injured Kids Launch Petition To Stop Dangerous Wal-Mart Bikes**

*Families in Five States Warn Parents About Defective Wal-Mart Bicycles*

Slidell, Louisiana-- Local resident Connie Gowan never imagined that a simple Wal-Mart purchase could impact her family's life in the way that it has.

Gowan is joining parents in five states in an ad-hoc group called SHOK, or **Stop Hurting Our Kids**. SHOK's mission is specific: they're asking Wal-Mart, the world's largest bike retailer, to stop selling defective children's bikes, and to adopt bicycle retail practices that include the registration of bike purchasers and public notification of all recalled bicycles and bicycle parts.

"What my family has been through after Sean's accident is just horrible, and I need to do what I can to prevent this from happening to anyone else's kid," said Gowan, a mother whose son was seriously injured after the front wheel of his bike came off while he was riding it near his home. "For Wal-Mart to hide information that could prevent innocent children from needless harm is outrageous, in my opinion."

Gowan -- an elementary school math teacher and hurricane victim from Slidell -- was misled by investigators into agreeing to a settlement after she was told that there had been no other bike accidents involving the model she purchased for her son. Once she learned that at least nine other families were in situations nearly identical to hers, she joined a group lawsuit and is now being countersued for *five times more* than she was misled into settling for.

From Louisiana, Georgia and Illinois to West Virginia and California, the parents of SHOK are speaking out to warn other parents across the country about these dangerous Wal-Mart bikes that seriously injured their sons and daughters. Ultimately, they are primarily interested in making Wal-Mart responsible and accountable for the products they sell.

Despite mounting evidence that the bikes have caused multiple accidents and extensive physical trauma to children, Wal-Mart refuses to accept responsibility for any of the accidents. Each of the SHOK parents was ultimately told that their child's accident was an anomaly, or that the accident was their child's fault, and that it certainly did not warrant any corrective action by Wal-Mart.

Each accident occurred in the same manner– specifically, the quick release component disengaged the front wheel from the bicycle’s fork and catapulted the child over the handlebars face-first into the pavement. Nearly all of the children suffered substantial injuries to their head, face and/or teeth. One victim suffered a seizure, and another mother commented that her son was “unrecognizable” after the accident.

Connie Gowan has joined eight other families in a group lawsuit against Wal-Mart and Dynacraft, the bicycle distributor. She hopes that the case will not only put an end to Wal-Mart’s practice of selling dangerous bikes but will also force a national recall of defective bikes still being ridden and help educate parents about the important ramifications of their child’s bike purchase. A jury trial is scheduled to take place in Marin County, California before the end of the year.

“If I had any idea that Wal-Mart bikes were unsafe and my son’s birthday present would bring such long-term misery to our home, I would never have bought the bike there,” said SHOK Mom Virginia Kines, from Georgia. “We’re still dealing with the repercussions of that decision more than five years after the accident.”

The accidents have created piles of medical debt. Additionally, parents maintain that Wal-Mart’s predatory practices against consumer complaints have caused them tremendous emotional distress. Parents were often “interrogated” by claims investigators and forced to provide receipts, other paperwork and contact information for anyone who had ever touched the bicycle, even though each accident in question was nearly identical to many others.

To warn other parents about what they see as a major public safety issue, the SHOK parents have posted a simple website ([www.shokbikes.org](http://www.shokbikes.org)) with pictures of their injured children, short accounts of their experiences, and a downloadable petition that they’re asking people to sign and circulate that defines specific actions Wal-Mart should take to ensure adequate protections for unsuspecting bicycle purchasers.

“We see ourselves as Moms united for a worthy cause. We’re doing this because no one is taking responsibility for these dangerous bikes,” says Cindy May-Carman, a single mother and member of SHOK. “It’s disheartening, if not enraging, to learn that this type of disregard for children’s safety has now become a part of Wal-Mart’s corporate culture, at the same time that they now advertise their so-called commitment to community,” May-Carman said.

# # #