

Lawsuit accuses sunscreen makers of exaggerated claims of protection

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LOS ANGELES (AP) - A law firm known for going after big corporations has filed a suit accusing sunscreen makers of exaggerating how well their products protect against harmful ultraviolet rays.

The lawsuit claims the sunscreens don't block all UVA rays, which can cause skin cancer. It seeks consumer refunds and wants to force the manufacturers to give up earnings from sales of such products.

"Sunscreen is the snake oil of the 21st century," said Samuel Rudman, a partner in Lerach Coughlin Stoia Geller Rudman & Robbins, which filed the lawsuit Thursday in Los Angeles Superior Court.

"False claims such as 'sunblock,' 'waterproof' and 'all-day protection' should be removed from these products immediately."

Coppertone manufacture Schering-Plough Corp. "vigorously disputed" the allegations, spokeswoman Denise Foy said. It and another maker, Johnson & Johnson's Neutrogena Corp., said their sunscreens comply with U.S. Food and Drug Administration rules.

Dermatologists agree sunscreens don't provide full protection but still consider them beneficial.

"It's akin to someone suing a seat belt manufacturer because seat belts don't prevent 100 per cent of the deaths," said Dr. Richard Glogau, a clinical professor at the University of California, San Francisco.

More than \$455 million worth of sunscreen and tanning lotions are sold each year.

The San Diego, Calif.-based Lerach firm is seeking class-action status for the lawsuit, which combines nine earlier complaints. Also named as defendants were Hawaiian Tropic, Banana Boat, BullfrogPlaytex Products, Tanning Research Laboratories and Chatterm Brands.

Among the law firm's other targets have been computer maker Dell, phone carrier Qwest Communications International, investment banks Citigroup and JPMorgan Chase & Co., and brokerage firms Marsh & McLennan Cos. and Aon.