

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
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VETERANS' AFFAIRS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

706 HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

(202) 224-2823
FAX: (202) 224-9673

90 STATE HOUSE SQUARE, TENTH FLOOR
HARTFORD, CT 06103
(860) 258-6940
FAX: (860) 258-6958

915 LAFAYETTE BOULEVARD, SUITE 304
BRIDGEPORT, CT 06604
(203) 330-0598
FAX: (203) 330-0608

<http://blumenthal.senate.gov>

January 10, 2022

Mr. Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 100
Culver City, California 90230

Dear Mr. Chew,

I write to express my grave concerns over TikTok's failure to ensure the safety of the users on its platform. Time and again, TikTok users—including children—are seriously injured attempting to emulate videos they watch. TikTok must do better to enforce its own community guidelines and promote the safety and best interests of all users on its platform.

Last week, a twelve-year-old boy in East Haven, Connecticut, was hospitalized after suffering severe burns. He had watched a video on TikTok of the "Whoosh Bottle Experiment," where alcohol is poured in a plastic bottle set aflame to hear a "whoosh" sound as the alcohol burns off.¹ Because alcohol is highly flammable, its mishandling can inflict serious injury and lead to devastating consequences. TikTok knows of this danger: multiple people were injured in a previous trend to draw shapes in rubbing alcohol and ignite them.²

TikTok's community guidelines state that the company does not "permit users to share content depicting them partaking in, or encouraging others to partake in, dangerous activities that may lead to serious injury or death," a position the company reiterated in its statement after last week's accident.³ The company defines dangerous acts as those "conducted in a non-professional context or without the necessary skills and safety precautions that may lead to serious injury or death for the user or the public."⁴ Yet TikTok has repeatedly failed to remove dangerous videos in the absence of external pressure. Until the "Whoosh Bottle Experiment"

¹ Olivia Lank and Eva Zymaris, "East Haven fire officials issue warning after 12-year-old suffers burns in latest TikTok 'challenge,'" *WTNH* (New Haven, CT), December 29, 2021, <https://www.wtnh.com/news/connecticut/new-haven/east-haven-fire-officials-release-warning-after-child-burned-while-attempting-to-do-latest-tiktok-challenge/>.

² Meredith Deliso, "13-year-old girl severely burned while imitating TikTok video, family says," *ABC News*, May 29, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/13-year-girl-severely-burned-imitating-tiktok-video/story?id=77980454>; Don Sweeney, "TikTok challenge leaves two Palmer AK kids with burns," *Sacramento Bee* (Sacramento, CA), September 30, 2021, <https://www.sacbee.com/news/nation-world/national/article254656692.html>.

³ "Community Guidelines," *TikTok*, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines>; Lank and Zymaris, "East Haven."

⁴ *TikTok*, "Community Guidelines."

caused a severe injury, videos associated with the experiment remained active on your platform. This is not the first time TikTok has removed videos and tags only after reports of serious harm.⁵ TikTok cannot wait for external pressure—and serious injuries—to act. TikTok should be enforcing its own community guidelines and promptly removing videos that promote harmful behaviors.

The onus is on TikTok to keep its platform safe for all of its users. I respectfully request that you meet publicly with Connecticut school officials, parents, and me, whether in person or virtually, to explain how harmful videos, such as the “Whoosh Bottle Experiment,” remained on your platform and the steps you are taking to rid TikTok of such dangerous, destructive content. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

⁵ Jordan Valinsky, “TikTok bans the ‘milk crate challenge’ because of injuries,” *CNN Business*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/27/business/tiktok-bans-milk-crate-challenge/index.html>.