

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF
CALIFORNIA

Liebick v. Samsung Electronics America, Inc.

Liebick · No. 2:25-cv-01300-DJC-DMC · Decided August 1, 2025

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of California granted Samsung Electronics America, Inc. and Costco Wholesale Corp.'s motion to dismiss claims arising from a house fire allegedly caused by an electric range. The court held that the plaintiffs failed to plausibly plead causation and did not adequately identify a viable products-liability theory, negligence elements, or the terms and breach of any warranty. Dismissal was granted with leave to amend within 21 days.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Daniel J. Calabretta
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the Eastern District of California
DECIDED	August 1, 2025
DOCKET	2:25-cv-01300-DJC-DMC
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants removed the action from California state court based on diversity jurisdiction and jointly moved under Federal Rules of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2) and 12(b)(6) to dismiss the form complaint for failure to state claims for products liability, negligence, and breach of warranty.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	On a Rule 12(b)(6) motion, the court accepts well-pleaded factual allegations as true and construes them in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party, but dismisses when the complaint lacks a cognizable legal theory or sufficient factual matter to plausibly support entitlement to relief. Conclusory allegations and formulaic recitations of elements are not accepted as true.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished

PARTIES

Neil Liebick, Sharon Clark, individually and as guardian ad litem for Jane Doe 1, Jane Doe 2, and John Doe, Jason Franklin v. Samsung Electronics America, Inc., Costco Wholesale Corp.

TOPICS

motions to dismiss

products liability

negligence

breach of contract

civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

products liability

negligence

contracts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the complaint plausibly stated strict products-liability claims under manufacturing-defect, design-defect, or failure-to-warn theories.
2. Whether the complaint plausibly stated a negligence claim, including duty, breach, and proximate causation.
3. Whether the complaint plausibly stated a breach-of-express-warranty claim.
4. Whether plaintiffs should receive leave to amend after dismissal.

HOLDINGS

1. The complaint failed to plausibly state a strict-liability or products-liability claim because it did not adequately allege that the particular range was defective, that the defect existed when the product left Samsung, or that a defect caused the fire.
2. The complaint failed to state a negligence claim because it did not plausibly allege duty, breach, or proximate causation.
3. The complaint failed to state a breach-of-express-warranty claim because it did not plausibly allege proximate causation and did not adequately allege the warranty's terms or reliance.
4. Dismissal with leave to amend was appropriate because plaintiffs represented that they could plead additional facts and the court could not conclude that amendment would be futile.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“The motion may be granted only if the complaint lacks a “cognizable legal theory or sufficient facts to support a cognizable legal theory.”” (at 2)

“A complaint need contain only a “short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief,”” (at 2)

“There is a “substantial probability that the design defect, and not something else, caused the plaintiff’s injury.”” (at 3)

“Plaintiffs do not present any viable theory of strict liability, and thus this claim must also be dismissed on this independent basis.” (at 5)

“Accordingly, the Court grants leave to amend as to all claims.” (at 7)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs purchased an electric range manufactured by Samsung Electronics America, Inc. and sold by Costco Wholesale Corp. Their house burned down in January 2024, and they later learned that the model was subject to a voluntary recall because its front-mounted knobs could be activated through accidental contact by people or pets. Plaintiffs filed a form complaint alleging strict liability, negligence, and breach of warranty, but supplied only a few factual allegations, including that the range started the fire and that the defect caused it.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Plaintiffs filed the action in the Superior Court of California, County of Shasta, after their home burned following their purchase of an electric range. Defendants timely removed the case to federal court and moved to dismiss. The court granted the motion as to all claims, but granted leave to amend and directed that any amended complaint be filed within twenty-one days.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- *Mendiondo v. Centinela Hosp. Med. Ctr.*, 521 F.3d 1097, 1104 (9th Cir. 2008)
- *Parks Sch. of Bus., Inc. v. Symington*, 51 F.3d 1480, 1484 (9th Cir. 1995)
- *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009)
- *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)
- *Trejo v. Johnson & Johnson*, 13 Cal. App. 5th 110, 125 (2017)
- *Daly v. General Motors Corp.*, 20 Cal. 3d 725, 758 n.1 (1978)
- *Stephen v. Ford Motor Co.*, 134 Cal. App. 4th 1363, 1373 (2005)
- *Karlsson v. Ford Motor Co.*, 140 Cal. App. 4th 1202, 1208 (2006)
- *Barker v. Lull Eng'g Co.*, 20 Cal. 3d 413, 429 (1978)
- *In re Coordinated Latex Glove Litig.*, 99 Cal. App. 4th 594, 613 (2002)
- *Nally v. Grace Cmty. Church*, 47 Cal. 3d 278, 292 (1988)
- *Harrison v. Gamatero*, 52 Cal. App. 2d 178, 182 (1942)
- *Baltazar v. Apple, Inc.*, Case No. CV-10-3231-JF, 2011 WL 588209, at *2 (N.D. Cal. Feb. 10, 2011)
- *Williams v. Beechnut Nutrition Corp.*, 185 Cal. App. 3d 135, 142 (1986)
- *Foman v. Davis*, 371 U.S. 178, 182 (1962)
- *Eminence Capital, LLC v. Aspeon, Inc.*, 316 F.3d 1048, 1052 (9th Cir. 2003)

- Intri-Plex Techs., Inc. v. Crest Group, Inc., 499 F.3d 1048, 1056 (9th Cir. 2007)

OPINION

Liebick v. Samsung Electronics America, Inc.

PER CURIAM.

1 2 3 4

5 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

6 FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

7

8 NEIL LIEBICK; SHARON CLARK, No. 2:25-cv-01300-DJC-DMC

individually and as guardian ad litem 9 for JANE DOE 1, JANE DOE 2, and

JOHN DOE; and JASON FRANKLIN,

10 ORDER GRANTING MOTION TO DISMISS

Plaintiffs, 11 v. 12

SAMSUNG ELECTRONICS AMERICA,

13 INC.; and COSTCO WHOLESALE

CORP.,

14 Defendants. 15

16 Plaintiffs purchased an electric range manufactured by one Defendant and sold 17 by the other Defendant. After purchasing the range, Plaintiffs' house tragically burned 18 down. Months later, after Plaintiffs received notice of a voluntary recall regarding the 19 electric range, they suspected the product caused the fire and filed suit for products 20 liability, negligence, and breach of warranty. Because they brought action in state 21 court, Plaintiffs completed a form complaint and attached just five sentences of factual 22 allegations. Defendants removed to federal court on the basis of diversity jurisdiction, 23 and they now jointly move to dismiss all claims, arguing that Plaintiffs fail to satisfy the 24 federal pleading standard. The Court agrees and therefore GRANTS Defendants' 25 Motion to Dismiss (ECF No. 10) with leave to amend.

26 BACKGROUND

27 Neil Liebick, Jason Franklin, and Sharon Clark, individually and as guardian ad 28 litem for Jane Doe 1, Jane Doe 2, and John Doe, (collectively, "Plaintiffs") purchased 1 an electric range that was manufactured by Samsung Electronics America, Inc. and 2 sold by Costco Wholesale Corp. (collectively, "Defendants"). (Notice of Removal at 3 15, ECF No. 1.) After Plaintiffs' house burned down in January 2024, Plaintiffs learned 4 that their electric range was subject to a voluntary recall because the knobs could be 5 activated through accidental contact. (Id. at 16.) Plaintiff filed a form complaint ("the 6 Complaint"), bringing causes of action for strict liability, negligence, and breach of 7 warranty. (Id. at 15.) The only factual allegations that Plaintiffs provided were: 8 On January 8, 2024 Samsung Model No. NE58K9850WS/AA, while being used in a foreseeable manner as the primary range/stove in the kitchen 9 of Plaintiffs' family home,

located 15801 Horseless Carriage Drive, Redding, CA 96001, started a fire. The fire destroyed the house and its 10 contents and resulted in bodily injury to all Plaintiffs other than Neil Liebick, who was away on a business trip. Plaintiff's [sic] purchased the 11 product from Costco in or about 2023. After the fire, this model electric range was subject to a voluntary product recall by Samsung because the 12 front-mounted knobs can be activated through accidental contact by people or pets. That defect caused this fire. 13 (Id. at 16.) Plaintiffs originally filed suit in the Superior Court of California, 14 County of Shasta. (Id. at 1.) Defendants then timely removed to federal court 15 based on diversity jurisdiction. (Id. at 2.) 16 Defendants now bring a joint motion to dismiss, arguing that the 17 Complaint does not satisfy the pleading standards under Federal Rules of Civil 18 Procedure 8(a)(2) and 12(b)(6). (Mot. at 1, ECF No. 10.) Plaintiffs oppose, 19 contending that they have satisfied these pleading standards.¹ (Opp'n, ECF No. 20 14.) Pursuant to Local Rule 230(g), this Motion is submitted without oral 21 argument. 22

LEGAL STANDARD

23 A party may move to dismiss for "failure to state a claim upon which relief can 24 be granted." Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6). The motion may be granted only if the 25 complaint lacks a "cognizable legal theory or sufficient facts to support a cognizable 26 27 1 Plaintiffs ask the Court to take judicial notice of litigation involving Defendant Samsung. (Opp'n at 5.) 28 Because the Court need not consider this litigation to reach its decision, the request is denied as moot. 1 legal theory." *Mendiondo v. Centinela Hosp. Med. Ctr.*, 521 F.3d 1097, 1104 (9th Cir. 2 2008). While the Court assumes all factual allegations are true and construes "them 3 in the light most favorable to the nonmoving party," *Parks Sch. of Bus., Inc. v. 4 Symington*, 51 F.3d 1480, 1484 (9th Cir. 1995), the motion must be granted if the 5 complaint's allegations do not "plausibly give rise to an entitlement to relief," *Ashcroft 6 v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 679 (2009). 7 A complaint need contain only a "short and plain statement of the claim 8 showing that the pleader is entitled to relief," Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2), not "detailed 9 factual allegations," *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). However, 10 this rule demands more than unadorned accusations; "sufficient factual matter" must 11 make the claim at least plausible. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678. In the same vein, conclusory 12 or formulaic recitations of elements alone do not suffice. *Id.* "A claim has facial 13 plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the 14 reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." *Id.*

15 DISCUSSION

16 I. Products Liability 17 A. Stating a Claim 18 A plaintiff may recover for a products liability claim under a theory of strict 19 liability or negligence. *Trejo v. Johnson & Johnson*, 13 Cal. App. 5th 110, 125 (2017). 20 To succeed under either theory, a plaintiff must prove: (1) that the product was 21 defective; and (2) that the defect existed when the product left the hands of the 22 manufacturer. *Daly v. General Motors Corp.*, 20 Cal.3d 725, 758 n.1 (1978). 23 Additionally, a plaintiff must show "a substantial probability that the design defect, 24 and not something else, caused the plaintiff's injury." *Stephen v. Ford Motor Co.*, 134 25 Cal. App. 4th 1363, 1373 (2005).

26 While Plaintiffs allege that Defendant Samsung issued a voluntary recall, they 27 do not plead that their range in particular had any defect, or that a defect existed 28 when it left Defendant Samsung. Even if Plaintiffs satisfied these elements, they fall 1 far short of plausibly stating that “the design defect, and not something else, caused” 2 their injury. See *id.* Plaintiffs summarily allege the defect “caused” the fire, which is a 3 legal conclusion that the Court is not bound to accept as true. See Notice of Removal 4 at 16; *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678. Similarly, Plaintiffs plead that the electric range “started 5 a fire,” but they provide no factual allegations supporting this conclusory allegation. 6 (See Notice of Removal at 16.) The Complaint is devoid of any factual allegations 7 showing that the electric range started the fire, much less that a fire was due to a 8 defect. As Defendants point out, the Complaint “says nothing about how the fire 9 began, whether the range was on, how it may have been activated, or how it was 10 involved in the fire.” (See Reply at 3, ECF No. 17.) Because Plaintiffs fail to 11 adequately allege causation, this claim must be dismissed. 12

B. Theory of Liability 13 “Under California law, there are three ways to hold a manufacturer strictly liable 14 for injuries caused by its product: (1) if the product is defectively manufactured; (2) if 15 it is defectively designed; or (3) if it is distributed without sufficient warnings or 16 instructions about its potential for harm.” *Karlsson v. Ford Motor Co.*, 140 Cal. App. 17 4th 1202, 1208 (2006) (citation omitted). As Defendants point out, Plaintiffs do not 18 identify under which theory they are proceeding. (See Mot. at 5.) Plaintiffs seem to 19 rely on the voluntary recall to establish that there was a defect, but that allegation 20 alone does not establish liability under any theory.² 21 First, a manufacturing defect theory requires that a “manufacturing or 22 production defect is readily identifiable because a defective product is one that 23 differs from the manufacturer’s intended result or from other ostensibly identical units 24 of the same product line.” *Barker v. Lull Eng’g Co.*, 20 Cal. 3d 413, 429 (1978). 25 Regarding the electric range, Plaintiffs do not plead that “a suitable design is in place, 26 27 2 Defendants cite out-of-circuit caselaw to posit that a recall cannot constitute a defect. (See Mot. at 5– 6.) Because Plaintiffs do not plead a theory of liability even when considering the recall, the Court does 28 not reach this question. 1 but that the manufacturing process has in some way deviated from that design.” See 2 *In re Coordinated Latex Glove Litig.*, 99 Cal. App. 4th 594, 613 (2002). As such, they 3 do not state a theory of manufacturing defect. 4 Second, there are two tests for establishing a design defect. The first is the 5 consumer expectations test, which requires a plaintiff to show “that the product failed 6 to perform as safely as an ordinary consumer would expect when using the product in 7 an intended or reasonably foreseeable manner.” *Karlsson*, 140 Cal. App. 4th at 1208. 8 Plaintiffs do not satisfy this test, as they do not plead that the electric range failed to 9 perform as safely as expected when used in an intended manner. The second test is 10 the risk-benefit test, “where the trier of fact is asked to balance the risk of danger 11 inherent in the challenged design versus the feasibility of a safer design, the gravity of 12 the danger, and the adverse consequences to the product of a safer design.” *Id.* 13 Plaintiffs also fail to satisfy this test because they do not plead any factual allegations 14 regarding the electric range’s danger.

Accordingly, they do not present a theory of 15 design defect. 16 Finally, a failure to warn theory requires a showing that “a flawlessly designed 17 or manufactured product becomes defective” because the manufacturer failed to 18 warn of the product’s “dangerous propensities.” *Id.* Because Plaintiffs do not plead 19 that Defendants failed to warn them of any danger, they do not state a theory of 20 failure to warn. 21 Plaintiffs do not present any viable theory of strict liability, and thus this claim 22 must also be dismissed on this independent basis. Accordingly, the Court grants 23 Defendants’ Motion as to the products liability claim. 24 II. Negligence 25 To establish a claim for negligence, “a plaintiff must show that defendant had a 26 duty to use due care, that he breached that duty, and that the breach was the 27 proximate or legal cause of the resulting injury.” *Nally v. Grace Cmty. Church*, 47 Cal. 28 3d 278, 292 (1988) (citation omitted). To show proximate cause, a plaintiff must 1 demonstrate “the injury was one that should reasonably have been anticipated as a 2 natural and probable consequence and as an immediate, as distinguished from a 3 remote or improbable, result of the negligence.” *Harrison v. Gamatero*, 52 Cal. App. 4 2d 178, 182 (1942). 5 Plaintiffs do not plead that Defendants had a duty use to care or that they 6 breached the duty. Moreover, even if Plaintiffs pleaded those elements, they fall far 7 short of plausibly stating that any breach was the proximate cause of their injury. As 8 explained above, Plaintiffs do not plead any factual allegations showing that 9 Defendants’ conduct caused the fire. See *supra* Discussion Part I. They therefore fail 10 to plead that their injury was reasonably “anticipated as a natural and probable 11 consequence” of Defendants’ negligence. See *Harrison*, 52 Cal. App. 2d at 182. 12 Accordingly, the Court grants Defendants’ Motion as to the negligence claim. 13 III. Breach of Warranty 14 “To plead an action for breach of express warranty under California law, a 15 plaintiff must allege: (1) the exact terms of the warranty; (2) reasonable reliance 16 thereon; and (3) a breach of warranty which proximately caused plaintiff’s injury.” 17 *Baltazar v. Apple, Inc.*, Case No. CV-10-3231-JF, 2011 WL 588209, at *2 (N.D. Cal.

18 Feb. 10, 2011) (citing *Williams v. Beechnut Nutrition Corp.*, 185 Cal. App. 3d 135, 142 19 (Ct. App. 1986)). The Court has already held that Plaintiffs do not show that 20 Defendants’ conduct was the proximate cause of their injury. See *supra* Discussion 21 Part II. Accordingly, the Court grants Defendants’ Motion as to the breach of warranty 22 claim. 23 IV. Leave to Amend 24 A court granting a motion to dismiss a claim must then decide whether to grant 25 leave to amend. Leave to amend should be “freely given” where there is no “undue 26 delay, bad faith or dilatory motive on the part of the movant, . . . undue prejudice to 27 the opposing party by virtue of allowance of the amendment, [or] futility of [the] 28 amendment” *Foman v. Davis*, 371 U.S. 178, 182 (1962); *Eminence Capital, LLC v. 1 | Aspeon, Inc.*, 316 F.3d 1048, 1052 (9th Cir. 2003) (listing the *Foman* factors as those to 2 | be considered when deciding whether to grant leave to amend). Dismissal without 3 || leave to amend is proper only if it is clear that “the complaint could not be saved by 4 | any amendment.” *Intri-Plex Techs., Inc. v. Crest Group, Inc.*, 499 F.3d 1048, 1056 (9th 5 || Cir. 2007) (citation omitted). 6 Here, leave to amend is appropriate because Plaintiffs state that they can plead 7 | additional facts, and the Court finds that Plaintiffs could save a claim

by amendment. 8 | (See Opp'n at 9.) Moreover, the Court notes that this action was filed in state court, 9 | which has more liberal pleading standards than federal court, to which this action was 10 | removed. Plaintiffs have not had the opportunity to amend their complaint since 11 | removal. Accordingly, the Court grants leave to amend as to all claims.

12 CONCLUSION

13 For the reasons set forth above, the Court GRANTS Defendants' Motion to 14 | Dismiss (ECF No. 10) with leave to amend. The hearing scheduled for August 21, 15 | 2025, at 1:30 p.m. in Courtroom 7 before District Judge Daniel J. Calabretta is 16 | VACATED. 17 If Plaintiffs elect to file an Amended Complaint, they must do so within twenty- 18 | one (21) days of this Order. Defendants shall file their responses to the Amended 19 | Complaint within twenty-one (21) days thereafter. 20 IT IS SO ORDERED. 22 | Dated: _July 31, 2025 "Darl J Cob tto— Hon. Daniel alabretta

23 UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

24 25 26 27 28