

N.C.P.I.-Civil. 744.10

PRODUCTS LIABILITY - SELLER'S AND MANUFACTURER'S DEFENSE OF CLAIMANT'S FAILURE TO EXERCISE REASONABLE CARE AS PROXIMATE CAUSE OF DAMAGE.

GENERAL CIVIL VOLUME

MAY 1999

N.C. Gen. Stat. § 99B-4(3)

744.10 PRODUCTS LIABILITY¹ - SELLER'S² AND MANUFACTURER'S³ DEFENSE OF CLAIMANT'S FAILURE TO EXERCISE REASONABLE CARE AS PROXIMATE CAUSE OF DAMAGE.

NOTE WELL: Use this instruction only with causes of action arising on or after January 1, 1996. For causes of action arising before January 1, 1996, use N.C.P.I.-Civil 743.10.

The *(state number)* issue reads:

"Was the [injury] [death] [damage] proximately caused by the plaintiff's failure to exercise reasonable care, under all the circumstances then existing, when [he] [someone else] used the *(name product)*?"

You will answer this issue only if you have answered the *(state number)* issue in favor of the plaintiff.

On this issue the burden of proof is on the defendant. This means that the defendant must prove, by the greater weight of the evidence, two things:

First, that under all the circumstances then existing, the plaintiff failed to exercise reasonable care when [he] [someone else] used the *(name product)*. Reasonable care means that degree of care which a reasonable and prudent person would use under the same or similar circumstances to protect *himself* and others from [injury] [death] [damage].⁴

Second, that the plaintiff's failure to exercise reasonable care was a proximate cause of the [injury] [death] [damage]. Proximate cause is a cause which in a natural and continuous sequence produces a person's [injury] [death] [damage], and is a cause which a reasonable and prudent

person could have foreseen would probably produce such [injury] [death] [damage] or some similar injurious result. There may be more than one proximate cause of [an injury] [a death] [damage]. Therefore, the defendant need not prove that the plaintiff's failure to exercise reasonable care was the sole proximate cause of the [injury] [death] [damage]. The defendant must prove, by the greater weight of the evidence, only that the plaintiff's failure to exercise reasonable care was a proximate cause.

In this case the defendant contends, and the plaintiff denies, that the plaintiff failed to exercise reasonable care in one or more of the following respects:

(Read all contentions of failure to exercise reasonable care supported by the evidence.)

The defendant further contends, and the plaintiff denies, that the plaintiff's failure to exercise reasonable care was a proximate cause of the [injury] [death] [damage] complained of. Failure to exercise reasonable care is not to be presumed from the mere fact of [injury] [death] [damage].

Finally, as to this issue on which the defendant has the burden of proof, if you find by the greater weight of the evidence that the [injury] [death] [damage] was proximately caused by the plaintiff's failure to exercise reasonable care, under all the circumstances then existing, when [he] [someone else] used the (*name product*), then it would be your duty to answer this issue "Yes" in favor of the defendant.

If, on the other hand, you fail to so find, then it would be your duty

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to answer this issue "No" in favor of the plaintiff.

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N.C. Gen. Stat. § 99B-4(3)

1. "Product liability action" includes any action "brought for or on account of personal injury, death or property damage caused by or resulting from the manufacture, construction, design, formulation, development of standards, preparation, processing, assembly, testing, listing, certifying, warning, instructing, marketing, selling, advertising, packaging or labeling of any product." N.C. Gen. Stat. § 99B-1(3)(1995). Thus, this defense applies to all product liability actions, whether they sound in contract or in tort. It should be noted that this particular defense is virtually identical to a contributory negligence defense. Under the language of N.C. Gen. Stat. § 99B-4 (1995), however, it applies to "any product liability action," which would include actions for breach of contractual warranties.

2. "Seller" includes "a retailer, wholesaler, or distributor, and means any individual or entity engaged in the business of selling a product, whether such sale is for resale or for use or consumption. 'Seller' also includes a lessor or bailor engaged in the business of leasing or bailment of a product." N.C. Gen. Stat. § 99B-1(4) (1995).

3. "Manufacturer" means "a person or entity who designs, assembles, fabricates, produces, constructs or otherwise prepares a product or component part of a product prior to its sale to a user or consumer, including a seller owned in whole or significant part by the manufacturer or a seller owning the manufacturer in whole or significant part." N.C. Gen. Stat. § 99B-1(2) (1995).

4. This standard is the common law rule for contributory negligence. As explained in *Nicholson v. American Safety Utility Corp.*, 346 N.C. 767, 773, 488 S.E.2d 240, 244 (1997), "N.C. Gen. Stat. § 99B-4(3) does not create a different rule for products liability actions; it clarifies the common law contributory negligence standard with respect to these actions."