BUSINESS

Mattel sued over ‘Wicked’ dolls with porn link

Toymaker has expressed regret for package error

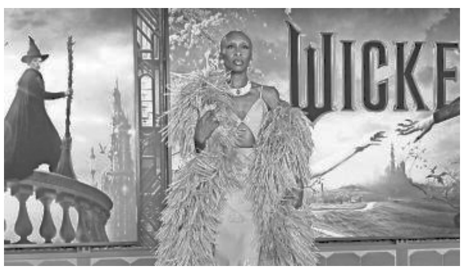
Jonathan Stempel
REUTERS

Mattel was sued on Tuesday by a South Carolina mother for mistakenly putting a link to a pornographic website on packaging for dolls tied to the blockbuster movie “Wicked.”

In a proposed class action filed in federal court in Los Angeles, Holly Ricketson said she bought a “Wicked” doll for her daughter, who then visited an adult entertainment website through the link provided by the toymaker.

Ricketson said her daughter showed her hardcore photographs from the website and both were “horrified” by what they saw, suffering emotional distress. The plaintiff said she would not have bought the doll had she known of the mistake, and Mattel has not offered refunds despite recalling the dolls on Nov. 11.

Mattel declined to comment on the lawsuit, but said in a statement that sales of “Wicked” dolls with correct packaging have resumed in stores and online. It has expressed regret for the error.



Cast member Cynthia Erivo attends a premiere for “Wicked” in Los Angeles on Nov. 9. MARIO ANZUONI/REUTERS FILE

The El Segundo, California-based toymaker had intended to link purchasers to the WickedMovie.com website, not to a similarly named website for people at least 18 years old.

Mattel recommends the dolls for children ages 4 and up.

Tuesday’s lawsuit seeks at least $5 million in damages for anyone in the United States who bought “Wicked” dolls whose packaging included the errant link.

It accuses Mattel of negligence, selling products unfit for sale and violating California consumer protection laws.

Other products from Mattel include Barbie and Hot Wheels.

Meta aims to tap into nuclear power

Seeks proposals from developers for reactors to start in early 2030s

Timothy Gardner
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – Meta said on Tuesday it is seeking proposals from nuclear power developers to help meet its artificial intelligence and environment goals, becoming the latest Big Tech company to take interest in atomic power amid an expected boom in electricity demand.

The company wants to add one to four gigawatts of new U.S. nuclear generation capacity starting in the early 2030s, it said in a release. A typical U.S. nuclear plant has a capacity of about one gigawatt.

“At Meta, we believe nuclear energy will play a pivotal role in the transition to a cleaner, more reliable, and diversified electric grid,” the company said in the release.

U.S. data center power use is expected to roughly triple between 2023 and 2030 and will require about 47 gigawatts of new generation capacity, according to Goldman Sachs estimates.

But it will be tough to swiftly meet soaring power demand with nuclear reactors, as companies face an overburdened U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, potential uranium fuel supply obstacles and local opposition.

Microsoft and Constellation Energy announced a deal in September to restart a unit at the Three Mile Island plant in Pennsylvania in what would be the first-ever restart for a data center.

That announcement followed a similar agreement in March in which Amazon purchased a nuclear-powered data center from Talen Energy.

Meta said it is seeking developers with expertise in community engagement, development and permitting, and would consider either small modular reactors, an emerging part of the business that is not yet commercial, or larger nuclear reactors similar to today’s fleet of U.S. nuclear plants.

Meta said it will take submissions from developers that want to take part in the request for proposals until Feb. 7, 2025.

The company said it was using the request-for-proposal process because, compared to renewable energy projects like solar and wind, nuclear is more capital-intensive, takes longer to develop, and is subject to more regulatory requirements.

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YVES HERMAN/REUTERS FILE

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket on a Starlink mission launches from NASA’s Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The rapid growth of Elon Musk’s Starlink network dominates low Earth orbit. MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY FILE

Companies plot new European satellite firm

Venture would aim to compete with Starlink

Tim Hepher and Giulia Segreti
REUTERS

PARIS – Europe’s Airbus, Thales and Leonardo are exploring plans to set up a new joint space company as they look to compete with Elon Musk’s Starlink.

“Project Bromo,” named after an Indonesian volcano, envisages a standalone European satellite champion modeled on missile maker MBDA, which is owned by Airbus, Leonardo and BAE Systems, three people familiar with the matter said.

Until now, Europe’s leading satellite makers have said only that they are looking at working together to create greater scale in a sector marred by heavy losses, as the rapid growth of Musk’s Starlink network dominates low Earth orbit.

Although still at an early stage, talks have progressed far enough to earn a code name inside Airbus and a preferred structure with a new company combining satellite assets, rather than one partner buying assets from the rest, the people said.

Leonardo CEO Roberto Cingolani told Reuters the talks involved various technical discussions and confirmed the intended structure would be based on the MBDA model.

“That’s the one; it is hard that it can be anything else,” he said on the sidelines of an event in Rome.

Airbus and Thales declined to comment.

The merger proposals are separate from job cuts to be unveiled this week and could take years to implement, one source said. But together, they represent a multi-speed effort to bring Europe’s struggling space sector into shape to face competition.

Europe’s top satellite makers have traditionally focused on complex spacecraft in geostationary orbit but have been hit by the arrival of cheap, tiny satellites in low Earth orbit. Cingolani said satellites would become 75% of the space economy.

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Job cuts

Talks to reshape the industry’s long-term structure come as thousands of Airbus workers await details of space and defense job cuts presented to unions on Wednesday and Thursday.

Airbus said in October it would cut up to 2,500 jobs, or 7% of its Defence and Space division, by mid-2026.

Thales, which has two existing alliances with Leonardo in satellites and services, is in talks with unions over plans to cut 1,300 space-related positions. The bulk of the Airbus job cuts are expected to fall in the $2.1 billion space systems business, reeling from $1.6 billion of recent charges, industry sources said.

Airbus has most of its space activities in France. The Defence and Space divisional headquarters in Germany is also seen as likely to be scaled back, while Britain faces concerns over the future of at least one plant. Spain is facing pressure in defense.

The four nations founded Airbus over 50 years ago and the share of any cost cutting is a politically sensitive topic.

Airbus has said cuts are expected to be achieved through voluntary schemes.

The emerging bromance between space companies via “Project Bromo” and its vision of a European satellite champion is expected to take longer, following years of stalled efforts.

MBDA was founded in 2001 through the merger of Anglo-French Matra BAe Dynamics, France’s Aerospatiale Matra Missiles and missile activities of Anglo-Italian Alenia Marconi Systems.

It is owned by groups descended from the founders – Airbus, BAE and Leonardo – with the first two having most control.

Just months after helping to set up the world’s second-largest missile maker, Airbus’ then-parent EADS pledged to “pursue the necessary restructuring” of the space industry.