Rubber Suit

Pouch patent causes friction

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HIV preventionists aren't the only ones griping about rumored drops in condom use: Manufacturers are also scrambling for ways to stay in the loop. The resulting rubber renaissance has produced creative "solutions" to such common condom blunders as wrong-way applicaton: Durex's new Gold Coin can be rolled on inside or out, for instance, and Ansell offers "butter-pat packaging" for easy access.

But the biggest, er, rub—that rubbers blunt penile sensation—has resulted in some sticky competition. This spring, two condom companies butted heads in a New Jersey patent dispute. Portfolio Technologies, owner of the Pleasure Plus condom, sought a temporary injunction against Alla Reddy, MD, claiming that his Inspiral condom, with a baggy top bulge (see photo) was identical to its product.

Both models are brainchilds of rubber-maker Reddy, 59, who has developed a cult following for exploiting the friction of moving latex. His Pleasure Plus creation sold wildly until a manufacturing problem yanked it off the shelf in the early '90s, causing Reddy to lose his financial pants and sell the rights to Portfolio, which started shipping its "new-and-improved" Plus in May.

Reddy's marketing maven, Brian Osterberg, protests the pouch parallel. "The Plus has a goiter-like bulge, and the Inspiral is shaped more like a soft ice-cream cone," he said. "The claim of infringement is frivolous. The other side is just hoping to save its skin."

At $1 a pop, the Inspiral was ready to ship to Eckerd and Genovese pharmacies and Planned Parenthood when the injunction put on the brakes. Rubber retailer Condomania reports piles of pre-orders. An appeal is expected either way the rubber bounces.

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