

WHAT'S IN THE TOY BOX?

TOXIC CHEMICALS AND CHILDREN'S PRODUCTS



This summer, manufacturers recalled millions of toys because of dangerous lead paint, including such beloved favorites as Thomas the Tank Engine, Dora the Explorer, and Elmo. Researchers have also found lead in children's jewelry and vinyl baby bibs and lunch boxes.

It's Not Just About Lead from China

While many of the recalled toys were manufactured in China where materials and labor are cheap and regulations are lax, the problem of toxic toys isn't just about lead from China. Many children's products - toys, baby bottles, car safety seats, baby shampoos, and clothing - contain toxic chemicals linked to a wide array of health effects including reproductive problems, learning disabilities, hormone problems, and cancer. Children are uniquely vulnerable to toxic chemicals, which can disrupt their development and cause lifelong health problems.

No Government Oversight of Toxic Chemicals in Consumer Products

Why is it that in 2007 children's products containing toxic chemicals still make it to store shelves and into our homes? The frightening answer is that there is little federal or state government oversight on toxic chemicals in children's products.

A Sensible Solution To Make Toys and Other Products Safe For Kids

Parents should be able to buy toys and other products without fear of toxic ingredients that might harm their children. Fortunately, there is a sensible solution:

- Only the safest chemicals and materials should be allowed in toys and other children's products.
- Manufacturers of toys and children's products must be required to test and disclose the chemical contents of their products.
- Technical assistance should be available to help businesses make safer products for kids.

After the passage of landmark legislation to protect our kids from toxic flame retardants, the time is right for Washington State to make toys and all children's products safe!

Nobody Minding the Store

The federal government has been slow to act to protect infants and children from toxic chemicals in toys and other products. For example, the only federal law on lead in toys is thirty years old and only applies to lead in paint. It does not regulate lead in other materials, making lead in vinyl (PVC) products (like baby bibs), plastics, or jewelry perfectly legal.

The federal government rarely regulates commonly used synthetic chemicals in consumer products, even those meant for children, despite current scientific understanding of the hazards of many of these chemicals.

For example:

- The federal government doesn't require companies to tell consumers what's in their products, or to label them so consumers can make their own choices.
- Despite all we do know about the dangers of lead and other toxic chemicals, manufacturers are allowed to use them in toys and other children's products even though safer alternatives exist.
- The federal Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) does not have the authority to ensure that toys are safe. The CPSC has no legal authority to test children's products before sale. Recalls are mainly voluntary and rarely happen unless a company alerts the agency of a problem.



While all of these toys contain lead in amounts well above the federal lead paint limit, the vinyl penguin and plastic car are legal because there are no federal limits on lead in vinyl or plastic.

States Are Taking Action Now

Fortunately, states are taking action where the federal government has failed to protect children from harmful chemicals in everyday consumer products. California, New York and Michigan have stepped up to regulate jewelry and other products by limiting lead content. Numerous states are considering laws to regulate chemicals in products, including Massachusetts, California, Connecticut, and Minnesota.

Washington State Should Not Wait To Act

Washington State cannot and should not wait for the federal government to act. While there are thousands of toxic chemicals on the market and many are in products our children sleep on, put in their mouths, play with, and wear every day, there is no system to ensure that these products are safe. The same chemicals in these products end up as a waste problem in landfills and incinerators and a contamination problem in Puget Sound, the Columbia River and other waterbodies. We also know these same chemicals are building up in the food chain and in our bodies.

The Washington State Legislature must take action now to protect children from toxic chemicals in toys and other products by passing legislation to:

- Require manufacturers of children's products sold in Washington state to disclose the chemical content of their products;
- Require manufacturers of children's products to use safer chemicals and materials; and
- Provide support to help businesses make the products that we need without polluting our children's bodies and environment.

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