

House Republican Press Release

December 6, 2006
Press Office: 860-240-8700

'Tis the Season To Check Toys Carefully



One of the most cherished memories of children (and their parents) is that of opening the gift of a new toy during the holidays. However, adults should pay careful attention to the toys they purchase for small children. The Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) recently published its 21st annual toy safety report. The

following is information from that report, courtesy of PIRG.

PIRG visited numerous toy stores and other retailers to find potentially dangerous toys and identify trends in toy safety. This year's report focused on four categories of toys: toys that may pose choking hazards, magnetic toys, toys that are excessively loud, and toys that contain potentially toxic chemicals.

Regarding choking hazards: choking on small parts, small balls and balloons remains a leading cause of toy related deaths and injuries. Between 1990 and 2004, at least 157 children died after choking or asphyxiating on a toy or toy part; seven children died in 2004 alone. The law bans small parts in toys for children under three and requires a warning label on toys with small parts for children between the ages of three and six.

Although most toys on store shelves are safe, some toys were found on store shelves that may pose choking hazards. Specifically, toys were found for children under three with small parts and toys with small parts for children under six without the required choke hazard warning label. Balloons, which cause the most choking deaths, are still marketed inappropriately for young children.

Regarding magnetic toys: during the last year, one child died and several others were gravely injured after swallowing tiny but powerful magnets now commonly used in magnetic building toys and magnetic jewelry. If a child swallows more than one of these magnets, the magnets can attract to each other and cause intestinal perforation or blockage.

Regarding loud toys: almost 15 percent of children ages 6 to 17 show signs of hearing loss. In November 2003, the American Society for Testing and Materials adopted a voluntary acoustics standard for toys, setting the loudness threshold for most toys at 90 decibels. PIRG found that several toys currently on store shelves may not meet the

standards for appropriately loud toys; in fact, several toys tested exceed 100 decibels when measured at close range.

Regarding toxic chemicals in toys: some toys can pose hidden hazards, exposing children to dangerous chemicals that are linked to serious health problems. For example, children's jewelry may contain high levels of lead, which can cause developmental delays or even death in children exposed to this heavy metal. PIRG found examples of jewelry on store shelves containing lead at levels ranging from 1.8% to 34% of the item's weight. Also, manufacturers are selling play cosmetic sets that include nail polish containing toxic chemicals, such as toluene and xylene. Since children often put their hands in their mouths, nail polish offers a direct route of exposure.

PIRG's report includes only a sample of potentially hazardous toys. Examine toys carefully for potential dangers before you make a purchase. Report unsafe toys or toy-related injuries to the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission (800-638-2772 or online at: www.cpsc.gov/talk.html)

One should not be afraid to purchase toys for children. The report notes that toys are safer than ever before, thanks to decades of work by product safety advocates and parents and the leadership of federal and state governments and agencies. However, careful attention paid to such purchases could help prevent the potential problems noted above.

Editors Note: State Representative Mary Ann Carson represents Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford and Sherman in the Connecticut General Assembly.