

Celebrating November as Toy Safety Awareness Month!



As the holiday shopping season picks up speed, the New York State Consumer Protection Board (CPB) is reminding parents that November is Toy Safety Awareness Month. The CPB has the following hints to help keep unsafe toys out of the hands of young New Yorkers.

Before You Buy: The Right Toy for the Right Age

All toys sold as new in the United States should contain a manufacturer's recommended age range for the item, determined by national standards that take into account the motor skills, mental ability and behavioral patterns of children at different ages. This information is required by federal law for products intended for children three and younger, and recommended for items meant for children older than three. Additionally, any items designed for children older than three that contain small parts, sharp points or balloons are also required by federal law to have warning labels that can help guide gift givers. It is critical that toys given to children be age appropriate. Therefore, toys marked "3+" or "3 and up" should not be given to children under three. When purchasing a toy, consider the ages of all the children who might have access to it. A toy with small parts purchased for an older child can find its way into the mouth of a sibling under three and become a choking hazard.

Before You Buy: Check for Recalls

Before shopping, visit the CPB web site at www.nysconsumer.gov (or the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's website for recalls at www.recalls.gov) for a list of current product recalls to ensure that the toys you want to buy (or that you already have) are not on a recall list. Retailers are required to post recall notices in their stores and on their web sites. If you don't see notices, ask the store or department manager for assistance. Any items in your home that have been recalled should be returned to the retailer or thrown out immediately.

Where You Shop: Consider Price and Quality

Be wary of very inexpensive toys. Sometimes, cheaper toys are poorly made, do not contain a recommended age range or are not otherwise properly labeled. Wherever you shop, always check the product for proper labeling. Although that inexpensive toy is a bargain, if it doesn't carry a safety label or it looks like the quality is suspect, the safe choice is to avoid purchasing it. Buying secondhand goods from thrift or consignment stores is a good way to recycle items that still have a useful life. However, care should be taken to ensure that these items are in good repair. Don't buy toys that have sharp points or small parts, toys that have flaking or peeling paints, or that have been recalled. Any secondhand items showing damage or excessive wear should not be purchased. Remember to always wash secondhand toys before giving them to children.

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As You Shop: A Careful Eye Keeps Kids Safe

Toys in dubious or nonstandard packaging should be avoided where possible. Look for proper safety warnings for small parts, magnets and the like, and verify that the phrase “Conforms to ASTM 963” is on the packaging. This wording means that the product meets national safety standards.

Regardless of your child’s age, be wary of toys containing small magnets, even if the magnets are encased in the product. If swallowed, these magnets can cause intestinal perforations or blockage, requiring immediate medical attention.

Be cautious when purchasing inexpensive metal jewelry for children. Over the past 5 years, the CPSC has recalled more than 15 million pieces of inexpensive metal jewelry (including 6 recalls in 2009) for high lead content. Exposure to lead, including casual exposure via skin contact, is dangerous to children and should be avoided. Charms and key chains are also dangerous for small children as they can easily break off and be swallowed.

If you have a child who mouths playthings, be wary of soft plastic toys and books that are not marked “phthalate free”. Phthalates, a chemical used in the manufacturing of some plastics, has been linked to child developmental problems. Unless it says “phthalate free” on the packaging, there is no way to know if plastic products contain phthalates.

After Your Purchase: Say Informed and Aware

Together with your children, read the product’s instructions from the manufacturer to understand how to play with the toy safely. Unintended uses of toys account for many safety problems. Fill out any registration card completely and send it back to the manufacturer promptly, as this information will be used to notify you in the event of a recall or other issue.

Household product and toy recalls happen often. Therefore, it is important to stay alert and regularly check www.nysconsumer.gov and www.recalls.gov. The CPB has a home inventory checklist to assist you in managing and keeping track of your toys. It can be found at the CPB web site, www.nysconsumer.gov/pdf/toychest.pdf.

Finally, be mindful of how your children play with their toys, and check them occasionally for damage. Keep small round or oval objects, including coins, balls, and marbles away from children under three.