

CHILD SAFETY BLOG

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Read This Before You Shop for Any Toys This Year

By [Patrick A. Malone](#)

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For 26 years the California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG) has issued a report about toy safety. [We wrote about it last year](#), and [this year's summary](#), "Trouble in Toyland," was released earlier this week. It identifies hazardous toys and offers safety guidelines for consumers. [Specific toys are listed in the complete report](#).

CALPIRG's work has resulted in 150-some recalls of toys that posed hazards for a range of reasons, including strangulation, choking, toxins, noise and sharp edges. But as a consumer watchdog, the organization knows the work isn't done. Although championing the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) of 2008 for its advances in toy safety, CALPIRG also notes that this year, "policymakers delayed implementation of its most stringent lead standard rules and enacted some narrow exceptions," and [we concur](#).

That said, here's what you need to know as you embark on the toy-buying season.

Lead

Lead is especially problematic for the central nervous system; childrens' developing brains are particularly at risk. Seven toys exceed levels CALPIRG finds excessive (the organization's threshold is much lower than the CPSIA standard).

Phthalates

Phthalates are of concern particularly for premature delivery and reproductive defects. The CPSIA has banned toys containing three phthalates and set temporary limits on three others, while tests continue. CALPIRG found two toys that laboratory testing showed to exceed limits allowed by the CPSIA by 42 and 77 times, respectively.

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Choking

Choking is a major cause of toy-related deaths and injuries. CALPIRG found several toys that violated standard intended for children younger than 3, and several others that support its call for the small parts test to be made less permissive. Some toys intended for older children failed to provide choking hazards warnings required for small parts or small balls.

Noise

One-third of Americans with hearing loss can attribute it in part to noise. One in 5 U.S. children will have some degree of hearing loss by the time they are 12. CALPIRG found three toys it considers too noisy.

Among CALPIRG's suggestions for improving toy safety are:

- The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) should review and, if necessary, expand its definition of a "small part" or "small toy" to include parts and toys that are larger than the current standard, but have been shown to pose a choking hazard to children.
- Cadmium should be limited in children's jewelry. See our [recent post](#) about the dangers of this toxic chemical.
- Lead and phthalate standards in toys should be vigorously enforced, and lead standards should be lowered.
- The CPSC must ensure that its product [incident database](#) it provides the information consumers need to make informed choices in the marketplace.

Consumers must realize that not all toys are tested, and not all toys on store shelves meet CPSC standards. There is no comprehensive list of potentially hazardous toys. Examine toys carefully for potential dangers before you make a purchase.

It's also a good idea to screen all children for exposure to lead via a simple and inexpensive blood test at a physician's office or public health agency.

Report unsafe toys or toy-related injuries to the CPSC at www.cpsc.gov and to www.saferproducts.gov or call the CPSC at 1-800-504-7923.

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