

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 21, 2017

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32nd Annual “Trouble in Toyland” Survey Finds Dangerous Toys on Store Shelves

Expert Tips Can Help Parents Shop Safely

MADISON – Stores nationwide are still offering dangerous and toxic toys this holiday season and, in some cases, ignoring explicit government safety regulations in the process, according to the Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group Foundation’s 32nd annual [Trouble in Toyland report](#). The survey of potentially hazardous toys found that, despite recent progress, consumers must still be wary when shopping for children’s gifts.

The report exposes fidget spinners full of lead, inadequately-labeled toys, balloons that pose a choking hazard, and data-collecting toys that may violate children’s privacy and other consumer protection laws. It also provides a list of toys that have been recalled over the past year.

“We should be able to trust that the toys we buy are safe. However, until that’s the case, toy buyers need to watch out for common hazards when shopping for children’s presents,” **said Emma Fisher, Campaign Organizer with the WISPIRG Foundation.**

For more than 30 years, the WISPIRG Foundation’s [Trouble in Toyland report](#) has offered safety guidelines for purchasing toys for small children, and has provided examples of toys currently on store shelves that pose potential safety hazards. Over the years, the report has led to more than 150 recalls and other enforcement actions.

Key findings from this year’s report include:

- **Data-Collecting Toys:** As toymakers produce more and more products that are part of the “Internet of Things,” data collection and the sharing of consumer information become greater concerns. For example, the report lists a doll, “My Friend Cayla,” found at Wal-Mart and Kohl’s, that has been banned in Germany for privacy violations. “My Friend Cayla” is the subject of a complaint by several consumer groups to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission because it may violate the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act. In July, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued a warning to consumers to “consider cybersecurity prior to introducing smart, interactive, internet-connected toys into their homes.”
- **Small Parts:** Despite a ban on small parts in toys for children under the age of three, WISPIRG Foundation staff found several toys that contain small parts, but do not have any warning label at all. These included a peg game, golf, and football travel games found at Dollar Tree.
- **Balloons** are easily inhaled in attempts to inflate them and can become stuck in children’s throats. Balloons are responsible for more choking deaths among children than any other toy or children’s product. *Trouble in Toyland* lists five balloon sets on store shelves at Dollar Tree

(H2O Blasters – Water Balloons and Disney Princess Punchball Balloons), Party City (Mega Value Pack 12 Water Bomb Packs and Mega Value Pack 14 Latex Punch Balloons), and Dollar City Plus (Party Balloons - 10) that are either marketed to children under eight or have misleading warning labels that make it appear as though they were safe for children between ages three and eight.

- **Lead:** The WISPIRG Foundation found two fidget spinners from Target which had dangerously high levels of lead, well over the federal legal limit of 100 parts per million (ppm) for lead in children’s products. The spinners were tested for lead at a lab accredited by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).
 - Fidget Wild Premium Spinner Brass, purchased at Target and distributed by Bulls i Toy, L.L.C.: The center circle tested for 33,000 ppm of lead, which is more than 300 times the legal limit for lead in children’s products.
 - Fidget Wild Premium Spinner Metal, also purchased at Target and distributed by Bulls i Toy, L.L.C.: The center circle tested for 1,300 ppm of lead.
 - On November 10th, Target announced that it will be removing the two fidget spinner models from its store shelves. Target had initially balked at our request to do so, citing a CPSC rule stating that general use products directed at adults don’t need to follow the same lead guidelines as children’s products directed at children 12 and under. The two models of fidget spinners we found were labeled for ages 14 and up. Our staff found them in the toy aisles at four Targets around the country, as well as on Target’s website. At the time of testing, Target.com indicated that the Fidget Wild Premium Spinner Brass was recommended for children ages 6 and up, which was misleading.
 - Now, the CPSC, Target, and Bulls i Toy need to ensure that these two fidget spinners are recalled, so that people who have already purchased the products won’t suffer any health consequences from playing with them.

“Even small amounts of lead in toys can be ingested when transferred from fingers to mouth or from fingers to food,” **said national lead expert Helen Binns, MD, pediatrician at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital** of Chicago and Professor of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. “Lead harms the developing brain and is easily ingested through normal hand to mouth behaviors. Beware of these two fidget spinners, as they have dangerous amounts of lead.”

“Our leaders and consumer watchdogs need to do more to protect our youngest consumers from the hazards of unsafe toys. No child should ever be injured, get sick, or die from playing with a dangerous toy,” **said Fisher**. “The CPSC, manufacturers, and retailers should classify all fidget spinners as children’s products and hold them to federal lead limits. It’s simple common sense. And to prevent children from being exposed to lead-laden toys in the future, the CPSC needs to revise its loose and arbitrary regulations for determining the age range of a product.”

Even though many hoverboards have been taken off store shelves over the past year, they continue to pose dangers to children. Earlier this year, two young girls and a firefighter tragically died from a house fire that was believed to be caused by a hoverboard that was charging and overheated. And just last month, another house fire was believed to be caused by a hoverboard. Numerous hoverboards continue to be recalled by the CPSC for faulty battery packs.

In a victory for consumers, the CPSC in October issued a final rule prohibiting children’s toys and childcare articles containing more than 1,000 ppm of five additional phthalate chemicals (DINP, DPENP, DHEXP, DCHP, and DIBP). The WISPIRG Foundation has been calling on the CPSC to ban these phthalates for several years

and applauds the CPSC for its new rule. Phthalates are a group of chemicals used to soften and increase the flexibility of plastics such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), and certain phthalates have been linked to altered development of the male reproductive system, early puberty, and cancer.

Parents and caregivers can also take steps to protect children from potential hazards. We recommend that parents:

- Subscribe to email recall updates from the CPSC and other U.S. government safety agencies available at www.recalls.gov;
- Shop with the WISPIRG Foundation's Toy Safety Tips, available at toysafetytips.org;
- Report unsafe toys or toy-related injuries to the CPSC at SaferProducts.gov;
- Review the recalled toys in this report and compare them to toys in their children's toy boxes;
- Remember, toys on our list are presented as examples of potentially-dangerous toys. Our list is not exhaustive and other hazards may exist;
- Put small parts, or toys broken into small parts, out of reach. Regularly check that toys appropriate for their older children are not left within reach of children who still put things in their mouths;
- Eliminate small magnet hazards from their homes;
- Be aware that toys connected to the Internet, as well as apps and websites, may inappropriately be collecting information about children. Learn more about the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA);
- Make sure that the hoverboards they own contain a UL2272-certification sticker from the product-testing group Underwriters Laboratories. However, even UL2272 compliance cannot guarantee that a hoverboard will not overheat or catch fire.

View the WISPIRG Foundation's full *Trouble in Toyland* report [here](#), or go to our website at <https://wispirgfoundation.org/>. Parents can find our list of unsafe toys, as well as tips for safe toy shopping this holiday season, at toysafetytips.org.

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[The WISPIRG \(Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group\) Foundation](#) is an independent, non-partisan group that works for consumers and the public interest. Through research, public education and outreach, we serve as counterweights to the influence of powerful special interests that threaten our health, safety, or well-being.