

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Robert Brounstein

Week of December 10, 2018 – Dangerous Christmas Toys

“Ho, Ho, Ho...Ho, Ho, Ho” Ah, the infamous line from the movie “Christmas Story” where all little Ralphie wants for Christmas is the Red Ryder air rifle. He sees his chance and visits Santa in the big department store and as Santa places his boot into Ralphie’s face, forcing him down the slide, he rumbles, “You’ll shoot yer eye out kid!” this is followed by another “Ho, Ho, Ho.”

For the past twenty years or so, organizations such as the United States Consumer Products Safety Commission and the non-profit Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) have been alerting the public as to unsafe items that come out just in time for the Christmas Holidays. In many instances they have been successful to recall many products and having them removed from the market. Current examples include a table made and sold by a popular furniture retail store, where the table’s glass extension leaf can detach and fall unexpectedly, posing a severe laceration hazard. Another product that has recently been removed from the market is an aluminum ladder that is susceptible to breaking, thus posing as a fall hazard to the user.

For 33 years, the U.S. PIRG Education Fund has conducted an annual survey of toy safety to coincide with Christmas shopping season. This year’s list includes the usual choking hazard suspects (toys with balloons, magnets or small parts) alongside some unlikely violators like toxic slime products.

Slime products?! Apparently, slime has been a popular toy product (manufactured by Mattel - the makers of Barbie) since 1976. It originally came in a toy plastic trash can and consisted of a non-toxic viscous substance that is squishy and oozy. Typically colored green, it is made primarily from guar gum – a material that has thickening and stabilizing properties used in food, feed and industrial applications. Different variations of Slime have been released over the years, including Slime-containing rubber insects, eyeballs, and worms. The main components are polysaccharide (long chain sugar molecules – for which is guar gum) and sodium tetraborate.

As the last ingredient mentioned (sodium tetraborate), there have been several slime products were found to contain elevated levels of boron-containing chemicals; a chemical used in pesticides and detergents which can cause nausea and vomiting if ingested and possibly impact reproductive health for children down the road.

Boron is a nonmetallic element, and materials that contain boron, such as borax, have been used in products for decades, ranging from detergents to roach poison. The US PIRG Education Fund said it found that concentrations of boron, as high as 4,700 parts per million (ppm), in many popular slime toys."

The United States – either through OSHA or the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists - does not have established workplace standards on limits for boron in products. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says exposure to large amounts of boron - about 30 grams of boric acid over short periods of time - can affect the stomach, intestines, liver, kidney, and brain. Such high intake levels of boron can eventually lead to death.



TerranearPMC Safety Share

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, fatal doses for children are estimated to be 5 to 6 grams.

But remember, we are NOT talking about boron; only boron-containing materials. The American Chemical Society has made an effort for the public to understand that not all forms of boron carry the same toxicity and that the known component used in slime, has very low toxicity. As explained by a member of the American Chemical Society, “You'd almost have to do something beyond reason to make it toxic, as a child would need to eat multiple containers before it reached toxic levels.”

The problem is that young kids are known to put objects – such as toys - in their mouths. So, the U.S. PIRG Education Fund wants to make parents aware that they should be closely monitoring their kids when playing with this toy and call poison control if any is eaten. And while manufacturers of Slime toys may argue over the possible toxicity of their products, should a child attempt to eat a slime toy, there still exists the possibility of a serious choking hazard.

And speaking of choking hazards..... one of the latest popular toys, Hatchimals (from Fabula Forest); has this fascinating characteristic; whereby children play with this toy and voila! An animal hatches from its egg. But, according to U.S. PIRG, the pieces of the hatched shell meet the legal definition of “small parts” and therefore are very susceptible for young children to place the pieces in their mouths and result in a choking hazard.

And how about the Haktoys ATS Battery Operated Bump & Go Action F-182 Fighter Jet 8-inch Plane?! The fact is this toy produces a continuous sound more than 85 decibels. In the workplace environment, that places a worker in the OSHA Hearing Conservation Program while meeting the ACGIH threshold limit value for an 8-hour shift! And while this noise measurement does not stipulate whether the noise generated (85 dB) exists at any appreciable distance or only right next to the toy, young people have an increased sensitivity to stimuli in general; thus even if this noise level occurs when a child has it next to his/her ear for a short time, elevated noise levels in general can pose as a possible permanent hearing disability which can manifest itself immediately or later in life.

And, remember there are a lot of toys that are high-demand items. When this happens, consumers can become very desperate to get that special toy for their special child. Such is the case with the “Kevin the Carrot” uproar, sold around the world at Aldi stores. Recently all the Kevin the Carrots were sold out, and that’s when things got ugly! Physical altercations broke out in stores as customers began fighting for that last Kevin. So, try to stay calm during this season of high toy demand. Be cool, be calm...let’s not turn an exciting shopping experience into a dangerous event!

Anyone who believes the competitive spirit in America is dead has never been in a supermarket when the cashier opens another checkout line - Ann Landers

