

Dangerous Children's Products May Be Lurking In Homes

\$4 Million Penalty Levied Against Graco Product Manufacturer

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CHICAGO -- From lead-laced jewelry to a Batman Batmobile toy, and beyond, the range of defective children's products recalled in 2004 was wide. Eighty-seven separate products were deemed hazardous to children last year, Target 5's Lisa Parker said, with millions of units involved.

Instead of reacting to recalls, Chicago-based Kids In Danger is calling for bigger change: to prevent the kinds of problems experienced by families across the country, including one very startled dad in Wheeling, Ill.

This week, a popular maker of children's products got spanked with the largest civil penalty ever ordered by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Graco Children's Products Inc. has been ordered to pay \$4 million in connection with its alleged failure to report safety defects in 16 of its products.

On Wednesday, Parker reported, the Chicago-based group Kids In Danger published its annual recall report , which

tries to notify parents of defective products like those in some Graco products.

The complaint started in Wheeling with a piece of home video that shows 3-month-old Tyler doubled over and gasping for air. Tyler's father said the boy was stuck in a Graco Travel Lite swing.

"I thought to myself, 'This is not designed correctly,'" Richard Kuk said.

Kuk's hunch about his son's swing was right, and it ultimately helped lead to a nationwide recall of the defective product, Parker reported.

But how the product got onto store shelves in the first place is part of what safety group Kids In Danger called a wider problem.

"Each year it's the same story," said Nancy Cowles of Kids In Danger. "Repeat offenders, clear violations of federal regulations, injuries and deaths from products that came to market without adequate testing, and stayed on the market way too long after their hazards were known to the company."

The group's annual look back at defective children's products showed an astounding 156 million units recalled in 2004 -- a number inflated in part by a record recall of lead-laced children's jewelry.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, a Democrat from Illinois, said she will reintroduce legislation that would mandate safety testing for the majority of children's goods.

"How many times do we have to itemize the products that are unsafe for children and remind parents that there is no guarantee?" Schakowsky asked. "These toys, these products, are not tested at all."

At Wednesday's press conference, a picture of one product that was not recalled sat amid the products officially recalled in 2004.

The product is portable play yards with raised changing tables, manufactured by Graco. Despite one death with the raised changing table, the item was not officially recalled. Instead, a new warning label was offered to consumers who owned the product in 2003.

Last week, however, another tragedy was connected with the Graco play yard. This time, a 12-month-old child in Canada was reportedly "killed when his neck became lodged between the changing table and playpen," Parker said, quoting from The Winnipeg Sun Web site.

Similar circumstances were reported in the first death connected with the changing table.

In connection with the recent death in Canada, Graco offered sympathies to the family, but said Canadian health officials have preliminarily said the playpen product met safety standards.

About the record civil penalty levied against it by the CPSC, a spokesperson said Graco denies knowingly violating consumer safety reporting requirements.