

Safety Group Calls for Stronger Rules on Lead in Toys

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BY ART GOLAB Staff Reporter - Chicago Sun-Times

A local children's safety group will call today for stricter regulation of lead in children's toys when it will release a list of 49 toys and children's products that have been recalled since 1990 due to high levels of lead.

Such high levels can cause learning disabilities and mental retardation in children.

The latest recall -- 150 million gumball machine jewelry trinkets -- was sparked by a Chicago Sun-Times investigation in which the researchers tested the toys in a lab.

Chicago-based Kids in Danger compiled the list of recalls to raise public awareness of lead in toys and to spur government action. Executive Director Nancy Cowles said because lead paint has been banned in the United States for more than 25 years, people assume there's no problem.

"They don't know that brand name products made by name brand companies are coming to their house painted with lead or have lead actually in the product," Cowles said.

Mandatory testing urged

Recalled toys with lead paint include McDonald's bobble head dolls and Little Air Jordan sneakers made by Nike. Several brands of crayons, chalk and jewelry on the list contained

actual lead.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission already bans "accessible lead" in children's products, but Cowles said the job and government should go one step further and set maximum allowable levels of lead. She also called for mandatory safety testing of children's products.

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) has introduced a bill requiring testing, but Cowles admitted it would be a "big task in the current regulatory climate" to pass such legislation.

"The more people that know there's a problem, the more pressure there will be from the public," she said.