

### Schakowsky Challenges Refusal to Ban Yo-Yo Balls

By Douglas Holt - **Chicago Tribune**

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Yo-yo balls have a more dangerous safety record than other products that have been recalled, U.S. Rep. Jan **Schakowsky** (D-Ill.) said in a letter Tuesday, questioning the failure of a federal consumer agency to ban the cheap toys.

Yo-yo balls--squishy water-filled rubber balls with a stretchy band attached--"have caused harm to a significant number of children," **Schakowsky** wrote in a letter to Hal Stratton, chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

"If this toy remains for sale, more children will ... run the risk of getting hurt."

Last month, the commission said it had received 186 reports of children who were nearly strangled when the cord wrapped around their necks, sometimes after they twirled the toy like a lasso.

Several cases resulted in broken blood vessels in the eyes. The agency said the toy posed a strangulation risk but said it was not high enough to warrant a recall.

The victims included a Skokie boy and Schiller Park girl whose mothers said the children might have died if an adult hadn't been nearby to get the cord off their necks.

**Schakowsky** said the agency has announced the recall of at least five products this year that have caused fewer reports of injuries.

Commission spokesman Ken Giles said the five cases cited by **Schakowsky** all involved violations that led to voluntary recalls reached with manufacturers or importers.

In the case of yo-yo balls, the agency does not have sufficient evidence about potential dangers to require a recall, he said.

The toys usually are made in China, and the agency's staff concluded that the risk was not severe enough to warrant filing suit to force U.S. importers to recall the toys, Giles said.

The agency already is at loggerheads with one large distributor of yo-yo balls.

In June the agency sued Imperial Toy Corp. of Los Angeles for repeatedly importing cheap toys that pose choking hazards. Efforts to reach the company were unsuccessful.

Rachel Weintraub, assistant general counsel for the Consumer Federation of America in Washington, called the agency's response to yo-yo balls inadequate.

"The commission should have done more," she said. "Toys should not wrap around children's necks. What you don't want is to wait for the horrible case when a parent is not there" and a child dies.

Short of filing suit against importers, the commission could have urged large retailers to stop selling the toys, Weintraub said.

Some retailers have taken action on their own. A spokeswoman for Wal-Mart said Tuesday the giant retailer voluntarily stopped selling yo-yo balls this month. Toys R Us and Walgreens previously had banned the toy.

As many as 15 million yo-yo balls have been sold in the U.S. in the last year, at a cost of \$1 to \$5, according to the commission.