

Analysis: Child Products Pose Dangers

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Consumers are growing more concerned about the safety of products -- from cribs, strollers and baby carriers to toys like yo-yo water balls -- that are marketed for use by young children.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has been protecting consumers since 1973 and has jurisdiction over more than 15,000 kinds of products. Last year, federal product safety regulators issued 87 recalls of children's products -- more than 156 million individual items, Kids In Danger, a non-profit child advocacy group, said in its annual report.

Toys accounted for 42 percent of 2004 recalls, sports and athletic equipment 20 percent, clothing 16 percent, nursery products 14 percent and furniture 9 percent.

The biggest recall of the year was for 150 million toy necklaces made in India. They sold for about 50 cents each in vending machines and posed a lead-poisoning hazard to young children.

The second largest recall was of 1 million children's toy rings also made in India and sold in vending machines for 25 cents to 75 cents each that also had excessive levels of lead.

Old Navy recalled 666,000 sets of children's zipped outerwear made in Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines because the plastic zipper can detach posing a choking hazard to children.

Eight companies recalled more than one product.

Graco Children's Products Inc. of Exton, Pa., the nation's largest maker of children's products, had the most reported injuries. The company was fined a record \$4 million this week for failing to report defects in 16 products -- more than 12 million units -- from high chairs to strollers in a

timely manner to the CPSC.

Graco recalled 1.2 million U.S.-made Toddler Beds Tuesday after 77 children were injured by limbs slipping between slats in guard rails and the footboard. Thirteen children suffered broken arms or legs, one a broken foot and 55 others had sprains, bruises and scratches.

The recalled baby beds were sold at discount, juvenile and department stores from February 1994 through March 2001 for \$50 to \$70.

Literally millions of products and toys previously recalled are still out there posing danger to children, said the Kids In Danger study, "Hazards of Child's Play: Children's Product Recalls in 2004."

Only seven states have laws banning use of recalled products in childcare facilities.

"How many more reports must be released about dangerous children's products before Congress responds? How many more recalls must be issued before Congress strengthens federal regulations so that dangerous children's products never make it into our homes, childcare centers, and pre-schools in the first place?" Rep. Jan **Schakowsky**, D-Ill., asked at a Chicago news conference.

**Schakowsky** advocates creation of a national seal of approval on child products. She plans to reintroduce the Infant and Toddler Durable Product Safety Act, legislation that would demonstrate children's products had been independently tested and met required national safety standards.

Congress had hearings on child product safety last year but failed to enact any changes in mandatory safety standards.

**Schakowsky** said legislation passed 24 years ago prohibits the Consumer Product Safety Commission from establishing mandatory standards for most products.

"It is clear that the current regimen does not work. It leaves our children in danger. Children's products are tested in our own homes, with our children and grandchildren as test dummies," she said. "The cost of those tests can be a panicked child, bruised fingers, a near-strangulation, fractured skulls, or a dead child. My legislation would guarantee that no swing, baby carrier or crib is sold without first being tested and meeting national safety standards."

The risk of bodily injury was the most common hazard posed by children's products in 2004 and was responsible for 39 recalls.

Graco recalled 140,000 Travel-Lite Swings after 128 incidents and injuries. A handle on the swing can move out of position striking a child's head, and the 3-point seat belt failed to sufficiently restrict the child's movement to prevent them from falling forward.

Kids In Danger Executive Director Nancy Cowles said a year-old Canadian boy was killed in a

Graco Pack N' Play playpen last week when his neck was caught in its removable changing table and rim.

Graco and CPSC issued a warning label on the playpen in 2003 but the product was not recalled.

"Unintended injuries are the leading cause of death for children under the age of 4, and many of these deaths are a result of unsafe products," **Schakowsky** said. "Congress has a moral obligation to protect the life of every child because a child who is injured, disabled or dies as a result of an untested, unsafe product is a one child too many."

Kids In Danger said the story on child product safety had not changed since it began reporting on children's product recalls in 2002: with repeat offenders, clear violations of federal regulations on choking hazards, injuries and deaths from products brought to market without adequate testing. The report recommended increasing CPSC staff and funding, lifting a cap on fines for violations of manufacturer's self-reporting requirements to encourage compliance, and including product registration cards for the purpose of notifying consumers when a product is found defective or is recalled.

The group, founded in 1998 by a couple whose 16-month-old son was killed by a portable crib, said when millions of anything is sold it is virtually impossible to retrieve and warned children should not be guinea pigs.

Ask Lisa Lipin, a Skokie, Ill., mother whose young son almost strangled while playing with a yo-yo water ball toy.

"Let's think about the 100-plus children who have died in their bathtubs while sitting in a bath seat. Let's think about the many children who have died in cribs and playpens that collapsed. Let's think about the nearly 400 children who have been injured in the past two years by a cheap toy known as the yo-yo water ball, and let us pray that a child does not die of strangulation while playing with this toy," she wrote recently in a letter to the Chicago Sun-Times.