

Schakowsky Wants Action Against Toys with Lead

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by Art Golab

Following a Sun-Times story showing dangerous levels of lead in toys sold in gumball machines, Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) Tuesday asked the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to take immediate action to eliminate the threat of lead in such toys.

In a letter to Hal Stratton, chairman of the commission, Schakowsky cited Sun-Times lab analyses that found lead levels as high as 180,000 parts per million in trinkets sold outside major discount and grocery stores in the Chicago area.

"This finding is particularly alarming, given that lead in paint is considered dangerous at any level above 0.6 parts per million and lead in soil poses a danger at any level above 400 parts per million," Schakowsky wrote.

Makers of the toys said the lead jewelry is coated to prevent the lead from leaching out, but medical experts say that swallowing the trinkets or even sucking on them could result in serious consequences.

Even in tiny amounts, lead can cause irreversible neurological damage, delayed physical and mental development and attention and learning problems.

The CPSC has been conducting its own study of the toys and has reported problems with the coatings.

"For years we've had a policy that there should be no accessible lead in a child's product," said agency spokesman Ken Giles. "The way the jewelry industry tried to deal with the accessibility question was to plate the jewelry, but they have not always successfully done that."

Giles noted that his agency has negotiated several recalls of this kind of jewelry over the past few years.

He said that the CPSC's investigation is ongoing and that the agency did not yet have a response to Schakowsky's letter.