

Why Some Parents Want to Ban Yo-Yo Water Ball Toys

By Leslie Hague - Daily Herald

April 28, 2004

SPRINGFIELD - For the past nine months, Skokie resident Lisa Lipin has made it her "mission in life" to ban yo-yo water balls, a popular children's toy, in the United States.

Yo-yo water balls are squishy balls attached to a stretchy cord with a loop on the end. Last summer, Lipin was in her kitchen when her son, Andrew, 5, ran to her with the cord of his water yo-yo wrapped tightly around his neck several times.

"My son nearly strangled himself," she said.

Lipin's consumer advocacy started the next morning, when she called the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and found it was already aware of the toy's dangers and was preparing a report on the topic.

"That just set me off," she said. Since then, Lipin has been in contact with legislators, toy distributors, toy stores and media pushing her message to ban the toy balls.

Today, she brings her message to Springfield, where she is expected to testify before a Senate committee. State lawmakers are being asked to lend their support for a national ban.

Last September, the product safety commission issued a statement, but not a ban or recall, about the toy. It stated the toy had a "low but potential risk for strangulation" if swung above a child's head like a lasso. It recommended concerned parents either cut the cord off the toy or throw it away.

The commission has received more than 300 injury reports related to cords wrapping around children's necks, said Ken Giles, a commission spokesman. There have been no deaths. In all of the cases, the child or someone else was able to unwrap the cord, he said.

The commission bases its decisions on patterns of incidents, the number of incidents, the likelihood of severe injury and its staff's assessment of the risk, he said. Banning the yo-yo water ball wouldn't meet the legal standard the commission must meet, he said.

"We recognize that this is a very scary experience for the child and the parent," he said. "But the bottom line is, we just don't see it as a sufficiently big enough risk to take regulatory action."

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, an Evanston Democrat, wants Congress to change the commission's standards, a move that would ban yo-yo water balls and other potentially dangerous toys.

Lipin estimates she works 20 hours a week trying to convince people to ban yo-yo balls, stop distributing them or stop selling them. She has requested injury reports from the commission and contacted more than 50 parents across the country.

Toys "R" Us and Walgreens have stopped selling the toys, and consumer agencies in New York and Massachusetts have issued warnings about them. Several countries, including Australia and Great Britain, have issued bans. Lipin said she will consider nothing short of a U.S. ban a success.

"The government has a responsibility to ban it," she said. "The bottom line is, somebody's got to do something."

Yo-yo: Walgreens, Toys 'R' Us have stopped selling the toy.