

Critics: Panel Too Lax on Kids Items Safety of Kids Products Questioned

February 24, 2004

BY GARY WISBY Staff Reporter

Recalls of defective and dangerous children's products are down, but that doesn't mean the products are safer, a report by Kids In Danger said Monday.

The group -- founded by University of Chicago professors Linda Ginzel and Boaz Keysar, whose toddler son died in a recalled portable crib -- and **Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.)** said the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission would order more recalls if it had stricter standards.

Since 1999, the commission's recalls of children's products have averaged half of total recalls, the KID report said. But last year, the 66 children's products recalled represented only 30 percent of the recalls.

"Children's products all of a sudden are safer?" KIDS' executive director Nancy Cowles said doubtfully.

The commission's "cost-benefit analysis" is "leaving products that are dangerous on the market with warnings instead of recalls, or in some cases no warnings at all," she charged.

Schakowsky is sponsor of a proposed Infant and Toddler Durable Product Safety Act, which calls for pre-market testing of products for kids. "Dangerous products should never make it into

nurseries, child care centers or anyone's home in the first place," she said.

Eric Criss, a spokesman for the commission, said recalls of children's products averaged 36 percent of total recalls since 1999, not 50 percent as claimed by KID.

He said the commission uses cost-benefit analyses for rulemaking -- applying to broad categories of products -- but never for recalls of specific products.

"The commission has not changed its recall practice," he said. "It seeks a recall where the hazards support a recall, period."

Singling out 2003, when a relatively small number of children's products were recalled, is misleading because the numbers can fluctuate widely from year to year, Criss said. For example, the number fell from 327 in 1999 to 309 in 2000, he said.