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Report

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SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, P. O. BOX 5757, COLUMBIA, S. C. 29250 1-800-922-1594

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PLAY

Play is in the nature of children. It is not merely an extra or inconsequential part of a child's life. It is through play that children imitate adults and learn adult habits. Through play they learn to be social beings. They learn how to interact with others, to take turns, to share, and to cooperate. Through play, children first learn about life by imaging, creating, and designing their own life situations. They learn to think through play; to live out their dreams. They develop muscles and muscle coordination. They learn how healthy physical play is for them, how it helps them to grow and strengthen their bodies. Play, therefore, is important to children and to all parents and adults. If children are to grow and learn, they must do so safely. Toys and games, bicycles, sports equipment, swimming pools, and playground equipment must be designed with safety in mind. To a child, a playground is anywhere, at school, down the block, at a friend's house, or in the backyard. Since adults cannot always be around to supervise children on the playground, children must be taught and reminded how to use playground equipment safely. It is natural that children will roughhouse on the playground. This type of behavior, however, sometimes leads to accidents. It is necessary, therefore, to change the child's behavior. In trying to motivate children toward play safely, the positive approach is preferred. Children should not be frightened into changing their behavior during playtime. The idea of playing safely should be emphasized. For example, Sit in the Swing should be emphasized rather than Don't stand in the Swing. Hang on with both hands rather than Don't fool around on the monkey bars. Children should be encouraged to care about themselves and the health and happiness of

playmates during playtime. They should be told how important it is for them to exercise, to take care of their bodies, to grow strong and healthy like their mother and father or some other real or imaginary hero. Older children should be taught that it is important for them to play safely because younger brothers and sisters will imitate them. They should be encouraged to take the responsibility of helping younger children play safely on equipment and with toys appropriate to their age group. It is important that all adults take the time to learn about play safety for the sake of the children and that they be properly motivated to protect all children from unnecessary hurt and risks in their play.

TOYS

The next best thing to being a kid with a new toy is being the father of a kid with a new toy. Most fathers have to see how the toy works before he turns it over to Junior. Usually, by the time he has finished playing with it himself, the youngster may be having fun playing with the box it came in. Sometimes a child is better off if he does play with the box. Toys are no longer as simple and indestructible as they used to be. In an attempt to create toys that are "educational," "motivational," or "psychological," industry has unwittingly managed to create toys which are oftentimes "dangerous." Every year over 150,000 children are seriously injured by toys that cut, puncture, burn, shock or choke them. Many of these are caused by playthings or parts of playthings being caught in a child's throat, blocking the air passage, causing suffocation. Never give a child a plastic bag or an object covered with removable plastic film or other plastic covering. You can protect your child

from many hazards by being careful when you purchase a new toy. Think about how the child will use, or misuse it. Watch for these more obvious concerns. Is the toy strongly constructed? Does the toy have sharp edges or points? Is the toy free of small parts that can be swallowed? If the toy has fabric parts, are they labelled flame resistant? Is the toy electrically safe? Toys should be built to withstand investigation by the curious. Wheels on wooden toys should be attached with screws. Pull cords should be fastened with staples, not carpet tacks or thumb tacks or they should be tied through a neat round hole in the toy. Edges should be rolled or turned in and the corners rounded. All toys should be made of material which, if broken, will not produce sharp edges. Be a label reader. Look for age recommendations, such as "Not recommended for children under three." As children grow older, they want items that are more exciting and more dangerous: chemistry sets, archery sets, air rifles, tool kits, sharp knives. Of course children should not be denied the fun of more sophisticated toys, but a stay in the hospital is no fun at all. So adults have to give some extra supervision while these are in use. Discuss with your child the safe use of every new toy, and be sure he or she is old enough and mature enough to understand and follow your instructions. The space available for use of playthings should be carefully considered. For example, a pair of roller skates or a skateboard given to a youngster living in an area where sidewalks are not paved and there is no rink is an invitation for him to try out the nearest paved street or highway.

TOY SAFETY REGULATIONS

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has set safety regulations for certain toys and other children's articles. Manufacturers must design and manufacture their products to meet these regulations. Products which violate CPSC toy standards are subject to recall. CPSC currently enforces toy regulations to: - Eliminate sharp points and sharp edges in toys and other articles intended for children under eight years of age. - Eliminate small parts in toys intended for use by children under three years of age. - Prevent electric shock and burn injuries from electrically operated toys and children's products. - Eliminate pacifiers and baby rattles small enough to lodge in a baby's throat, and ensure that they will not come apart into small pieces. - Prevent lawn darts from being sold in toy stores and toy departments, and require that they be labeled to

indicate their puncture hazard. - Keep clacker balls from shattering or flying off the ends of the cord. - Ban aluminized polyester film kites which can become entangled in power lines and cause electric shocks. - Prevent hearing damage from excessively loud toy caps and toy guns. - Limit to less than 0.06 percent the amount of lead in paint used on toys and other children's articles. - Ban the use of poisonous and otherwise harmful chemicals in toys and other articles intended for use by children. Chemistry sets and other products designed for older children, which by their very nature must contain chemicals, may be sold if accompanied by instructions and warning labels. Not all toy-related injuries can be prevented by regulations. Since many children are injured by falling on or misusing toys, they should be taught responsible, safe play habits. New and old toys around the house should be checked for possible hazards. The CPSC has the following suggestions for toy safety: - Avoid toys that are too complex for young children. Toys should suit the skills, abilities, and interests of the individual child. Remember that a toy that is safe for an 8-year old may be hazardous for a younger child. - Read labels and instructions carefully before buying. - Look for labels with age recommendations such as: "Recommended for Children Three to Five Years Old." Also use your own judgement in deciding whether a toy is too difficult for a youngster. - Toys that shoot objects may injure eyes. - Check toys used by children under three for any small parts or broken pieces that children could put in their mouths and choke on. - Demonstrate and discuss with children how to use toys properly and safely. - Encourage children to put away their toys so they are not broken and so that no one trips or slips on them. - Examine toys periodically. Watch out particularly for sharp edges and points. Sand splintered wooden surfaces. Repair broken toys and discard toys that cannot be fixed. Remember, there is no substitute for adult supervision.

ELECTRICALLY OPERATED TOYS

Electrically operated toys and other electrical products made for children can present many possible dangers: electric shock; burns, especially if the product has a heating element; sharp edges and points and dangerous moving parts. The CPSC has issued regulations for the manufacture of safer electrically operated toys. Some of the requirements are: electrical parts and potentially hazardous moving parts must be

securely enclosed to prevent accidental contact. - Electric toy sewing machines must be designed so that a child's finger won't be injured by the needle. - Heating elements must not produce shocks. - Products designed for use with water, such as electrically heated toy steam engines, must keep the electrical parts in a sealed chamber and separated from the water. - Electrical plugs must have safety shields to protect small fingers from accidentally touching the prongs when the toy is being plugged into a wall outlet. - Products which exceed a certain temperature must have a label warning that the surface is hot. Labels and packages must carry safety information to help buyers choose the right toy for the child's age and to warn the user of potential hazards. - No item with a heating element may be recommended for children under 8 years of age. - Hobby items that reach very high temperatures, such as woodburning tools, cannot be recommended for children under 12 years of age. These and other requirements help assure that electrically operated products for children will be as safe as can reasonably be expected. But this solves only part of the problem. Adults should choose carefully when buying these products, supervise their use in the home, and repair or discard them if damaged. In addition, be sure that your child knows how to use the item safely, understands all the instructions and warning labels, and is aware of the hazards of misusing the toy. Infants and toddlers should not be allowed in the area while an electrical toy is being used.

SELECT PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT WISELY

Most playground equipment is purchased unassembled. Be sure that it comes with complete instructions for assembly and installation. Install equipment according to the instructions. If necessary, ask someone with mechanical skill to help put it together and set it up correctly. To help reduce the severity of injuries from falls, place equipment on a grassy or soft ground surface - never over hard surfaces such as concrete, blacktop, brick, or cinders. Equipment should be at least six feet from fences, walkways, walls, or other play areas. Legs should be set in concrete below ground level to prevent a tripping hazard. Place metal sliding boards in shaded areas to prevent burns from sun-heated sliding surfaces. A landing pit in front of slides can be constructed from sand, tanbark, or similar materials. A block can be placed under each end of a seesaw so children will not catch their feet if the board descends too rapidly.

Maintenance checks should be made at the beginning of the play season and at least every two weeks during the season. Tighten any loose nuts, bolts, or hooks. Apply tape over protruding screws or bolts, and over sharp or rough edges, particularly on swing seats and exits of slides. Replace rusted parts, including swing chains. Replace worn ropes on climbing nets, and on tire swings or standard swings attached to a tree. Nylon or synthetic rope is usually more durable than rope made of natural fibers. Oil moving metal parts. Sand and repaint any rusted metal tubing, using unleaded paint. Sand any wooden equipment where splinters are found. Refill landing pits and clear them of debris. Cover foundations with several inches of soil.

TOY DANGERS

Think toy safety and know the seven toy dangers: Sharp edges can cut. Small parts can be swallowed or inhaled. Sharp points can puncture. Loud noises can damage hearing. Propelled objects can injure eyes. Electric toys can shock or burn. Wrong toys for the wrong age can injure.

INFORMATION AVAILABLE

For more information about Toy Safety, write TOYS, Washington, DC 20207. Or call the toll-free hotline: 1-800-638-2666.

SAFE PLAY

You can help protect children's freedom to imagine, dream, have fun, learn and grow if you select play equipment wisely, install and maintain equipment correctly, instruct children in safe play habits, and supervise children to correct their behavior at play.

TOY SELECTION CHECKLIST

The following checklist can be used by consumer parents or other adults while inspecting the toys their children presently have and when considering the purchase of new toys: Will my child be able to use this toy safely? Are there any labels on the toy to indicate for which age group the toy is intended? Does the toy have sharp points either on the outside or inside that can puncture if the toy is broken? Does the toy have sharp edges that can cut? If the toy is made of plastic, is the plastic durable

enough to survive rough play? Are there small parts that can be swallowed or inhaled? Does the toy involve shooting or throwing objects that injure eyes? Does the toy make sharp loud noises that could damage a child's hearing?

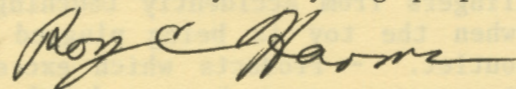
REPORTING DANGEROUS TOYS

To report a toy-product hazard or toy-safety related injury, write to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, DC 20207. The toll-free hotline is 1-800-638-2666. The teletype Hotline for the deaf is 1-800-638-2690 and the TTY operates from 8:30AM to 5:00PM EST.

ADDENDA

If poorly designed or misused, toys can be dangerous playthings. Falls, on or against toys are a frequent type of accident. Children have also been seriously injured when they swallowed or choked on small parts, placed tiny toys in noses or ears and cut themselves on sharp edges and points. The CPSC has set safety regulations for certain toys and other children's articles. Manufacturers must design and manufacture their products to meet these regulations. Products which violate CPSC toy standards are subject to recall. Not all toy-related injuries can be prevented by regulations. Since many children are injured by falling on or misusing toys, children should be taught responsible, safe play habits. There is no way we can eliminate all accidents from a child's experience. What we must attempt to do is to minimize the seriousness of the accidents he

or she will have and to eliminate as much as possible those conditions that might lead to fatality. We hope that this issue of our newsletter may bring about heightened toy safety awareness among all those individuals - children, parents, expectant parents, older brothers and sisters, grandparents, day care workers and teachers - people who find themselves in one way or another responsible for the care and safety of young people.



Roy C. Harms
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