

Safe toys are no accident

When toys are poorly designed or misused, harmless playthings can spell disaster.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) urges parents to take an active role in playtime activities.

By following these basic guidelines, playtime can be fun, educational—and SAFE.

Selecting toys

Choose the right toy for the right child. Consider the child's age, interest and abilities when toy shopping. Always read labels carefully and follow age recommendations. Check the warning label. Be cautious of products where the label conflicts with information elsewhere on the packaging or is written in ungrammatical English. Look for a label that indicates the toy meets "ASTM F963". This means the toy complies with various safety standards and labeling requirements – including sound producing toys, lead and magnets. Remember that the toy industry does extensive research on child development to set these guidelines.

Infant toys, such as rattles, squeeze toys, and teethers, should be big enough so they can't lodge in the child's throat.

Avoid infant toys with long strings or ropes. They can easily entangle or even strangle small children. No

string should be longer than 6 inches in length.

Young children enjoy bright colored, lightweight toys. Choose unbreakable toys without small parts such as removable eyes or limbs.

Toys made from metal or glass are for older children. So are pointy objects such as play tools.

Even innocent playthings like balloons cause injuries or even death. They are a deadly choking hazard for children under 3 years old.

Electric toys are for children over 8 years old. Trains, miniature stoves, sewing machines, etc. can cause serious burns or shock if toys are old, damaged or misused. Always supervise children using electric toys.

Look for quality design and construction. Poorly constructed toys or those made from cheap materials may break easily, leaving sharp edges, wires or pieces that can hurt children.

Select toys with proper safety features.

Choose toys that are non-flammable, flame resistant, painted with non-toxic paint, and/or made from washable/hygienic materials.

Avoid no-name products. They are commonly found in dollar and discount stores. A manufacturer name and address is not a guarantee of safety,

but it means that you or authorities can track down a legitimate corporation to remedy problems.

Be cautious of extraordinary bargains. Products that are far less expensive than comparable items sold elsewhere could be cheap because they are counterfeit or otherwise defective.

Look for safety features and/or warnings listed on the label.

Select arrows or darts with soft cork tips, rubber suction cups or other protective tips. Such toys are only for older children.

Avoid dart guns, sling shots and other toys capable of firing small objects. They can cause blinding eye injuries.

When selecting household art materials, such as crayons and paint sets, look for a label that indicates the toy meets "ASTM D4236". This means the item has been reviewed by a toxicologist and labeled with cautionary information, if necessary.

Beware of products sold by street merchants, flea market vendors, and other "informal" retailers. Retailers can be held legally liable for unsafe products, but it can be hard to collect from fly-by-night vendors.

If you shop at yard sales or thrift stores, check to see that your purchases, especially electrical appliances, toys, cribs, car seats, and other children's

gear, have not been recalled. Visit www.recalls.gov to learn about specific recalls.

Perform your own choking-hazard assessment. Use the cardboard tube of a toilet-paper roll to test toys and other items accessible to children under 3. To reduce choking risks, reject objects that pass through the tube.

Protecting hearing

Be sure to watch out for toys that can damage your child's hearing when used longer than 15 minutes. To protect your child's hearing consider the following:

- Look for a label that indicates the toy meets "ASTM F963".
- Test toys in the store. If a toy hurts your ears it is probably too loud for your child's, more sensitive, ears.
- Cover the sound piece of a toy with masking tape to decrease the volume.
- Superglue™ the volume control to the lowest setting.
- Remove the batteries and let your child create their own sound effects (great for the imagination).
- If visiting another home with loud toys, redirect your child's attention to a quieter toy, such as a book or stuffed animal.

Inspecting toys

Patronize toymakers that pretest products. The 500 plus companies in the Toy Industry Association, who account for approximately 85% of domestic toy sales, require such testing as a condition of membership. For a list of members, go to www.toy-tia.org; click on "About TIA," then on "TIA Directories."

Inspect toys monthly to make sure toys are in good condition for safe play.

Watch for sharp points and edges.

Toys may have wires and metal parts that can hurt children. These points can emerge as the toy ages, making a child's favorite toy a potential danger.

Check for small broken parts.

Routinely inspect toys to make sure parts are not broken, exposing smaller pieces, screws or metal pieces that could be swallowed.

Throw away unsafe toys where children cannot find them. Do not save unsafe toys for rummage sales or pass them on to other children.

Using and storing toys

Teach your child how to use the toy properly and safely.

Many accidents are a result of normally safe toys used for the wrong purpose or in unsafe conditions. There is no substitute for adult supervision.

Carefully read instructions for assembly and use of the toy. Go over the instructions with the child before handing over the toy. Keep the instructions on hand for future questions regarding the use of the toy.

Remove and discard all packaging from the toy before giving it to a child. Toy packaging can be very dangerous to a child. It can contain small parts and plastics which can become choking and suffocation hazards.

Explain the importance of proper toy care and storage. Left on the floor, toys may be stepped on and easily broken. This leads to potential hazards from damaged toys and small broken parts.

Let older children know their responsibilities. If children are in different age groups, older siblings need to keep their toys out of reach of curious youngsters.

Separate toys into different rooms or shelves, out of reach to curious young

children. A safe toy for a 5-year-old could be deadly for a toddler.

If you own it

Periodically check the federal list of recalled products at www.recalls.gov. Recalls are also available free in searchable form at www.cpsc.gov or www.ConsumerReports.org.

Electrical goods

Buy only certified electrical products. Underwriters Laboratories marks must generally be tagged or embossed right on the product. The UL tag or sticker on toys, lamps, fans, extension cords, night lights, and other electrical items made in China after 1996 must be holographic, stored on the toy. The UL tag on holiday light strings made anywhere in the world after 1993 must be holographic. Other certifiers include the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and Intertek ETL Semko.

Finally, have fun!

Playtime is a very important learning activity for young children. It's time for experimenting, exploring, and experiencing a new and exciting world. With a little thought and a few safety precautions, both parents and children can have a great—and **safe**—playtime.

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

(800) 422-7128

2811 Agriculture Drive
PO Box 8911
Madison WI 53708-8911
(608) 224-4976

FAX: (608) 224-4939

TTY: (608) 224-5058

E-MAIL:
DATCPHotline@Wisconsin.gov

WEBSITE:
www.datcp.state.wi.us