



Don't Leave Toy Safety to Chance

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MADISON – We consider a number of factors when we shop for a gift for children – what’s popular, what they are excited about, what they need – but we may not always think about the most important factor: safety. Even the most popular toy may not be appropriate for the intended child or safe for other children in the home.

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection asks consumers to think about the safety of each potential gift before hitting the register this holiday season.

“Pay attention to the safety guidance on the packaging and consider whether any small pieces, magnets, chemicals or other factors might be a danger to children in the home,” said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

A product’s popularity doesn’t dictate its safety. This summer, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) announced a recall on one of last year’s most popular gifts: “hoverboards” (self-balancing scooters). The CPSC recalled more than 500,000 hoverboards due to fire hazards caused by overheating batteries. At least 99 incidents of burns or property damage were reported to the agency with reports of batteries overheating, sparking, smoking, catching fire and/or exploding.

The devices in these recalls were not UL-certified, meaning they did not meet the globally recognized standards for safety. If you are considering buying a hoverboard or any other product that has electrical or battery components, make sure the model has been issued a safety certification before making your purchase.

Look for these labels on toy packaging or on product pages:

- General warning labels listing the potential for small parts, magnets, suffocation hazards, etc.
- Age grading: use the manufacturer’s suggested age range as a foundation for whether a toy is appropriate for the physical development of a child.
- All toys: “ASTM F963” – this label indicates that a toy meets the latest toy safety standards. All toys sold in the U.S. must meet this standard. ASTM F963 includes guidelines and test methods to prevent injuries from choking, sharp edges and other potential hazards.
- Art materials: “ASTM D4236” – this label indicates that art materials have been reviewed by a toxicologist and are labeled with cautionary information, if necessary.
- Toys with fabrics: “Flame resistant” – this label means that a material will resist burning and should extinguish quickly once removed from an ignition source.

Some additional things to think about when shopping for gifts for children:

- Pick up any safety items that go along with a toy such as a helmet for a bike or scooter.
- For homes with younger children, avoid toys with small parts, magnets, cords or strings.
- Choose gifts that are both age and skill appropriate for the child.
- Check for recalled toys at the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission’s website: www.CPSC.gov.

- Watch out for “button batteries,” coin-sized (or smaller) batteries that are used in some toys, remote controls, flashlights, hearing aids and more. Never let a child play with these batteries as they pose a choking hazard and can cause serious internal chemical burns in as little as two hours. Make sure that any toys that use these batteries have a screw to secure the battery compartment.
- Watch out for gifts containing high-powered magnets. These small “rare earth” magnets can easily be swallowed by children and can attract one another in the intestinal tract, requiring surgical removal.
- Avoid no-name products. A manufacturer’s name and address is not a guarantee of safety, but it means you can track down a legitimate company to remedy problems.
- Look for hidden dangers such as sharp points, loud noises or projectiles.
- If you are purchasing wooden toys, look for splinters or sharp edges.
- If you are purchasing used toys, skip ones with chipped paint in order to avoid possible exposure to lead.

Safety concerns don’t end at the register. Be mindful of younger children and keep small or pointed toys and accessories out of their reach. Lastly, make sure to read any battery charging instructions that come with toys as chargers and adapters can overheat and pose burn hazards to young children.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcph hotline@wisconsin.gov.

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