

Coalition for a Safe & Healthy CT
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Lead is Just the Tip of the Toy Iceberg

What Connecticut can do about Toxic Chemicals in Children's Products

Hartford—Recent recalls of toys containing lead have highlighted the fact that corporate and government inaction has left children vulnerable to toxic chemicals lurking in their toy boxes. Advocates and legislators gathered at the Legislative Office Building today showed that the toxic chemical problem extends far beyond the toy box and into to a wide variety of products used everyday in our homes and that lead is not the only cause for concern. Proposed legislation in Connecticut would address the problem of toxic chemicals in household and other products and legislators and advocates with the Coalition for a Safe & Healthy Connecticut are calling for action.

"Prevention, prevention, prevention!" said **Annamarie Beaulieu, Campaign Coordinator for the Connecticut Public Health Association**. "By ensuring that toxic toys are not produced or sold in Connecticut, we will help to prevent exposures to lead and phthalates that can affect our children's health."

"This is an opportunity to do some tremendous good for the citizens and economic interests of Connecticut, while bringing our chemical policies for children's products into the twenty-first century," said **Representative Richard Roy (D-Milford), Co-chair of the legislature's Environment Committee**. "This legislation will phase out some of the substances of most concern such as lead, phthalates, and bisphenol A from products for children."

A growing body of research shows the presence of toxic chemicals that are linked to cancers, learning disabilities, reproductive problems, asthma and other health risks in children's products. Examples include phthalates for softening plastic in rubber duckies, plastic baby books, bibs and other toys, Bisphenol-A in baby bottles, toys, and canned food, as well as lead in bibs, lunch boxes and children's jewelry.

"I do everything I can to keep my child safe but there's no way to know what's in these products!" said **Joanne Badin, a mother from Rockfall**, who came to the Legislative Office Building with her young daughter. "I check the ingredients in the food my daughter eats, but there's no ingredient list for toys that she plays with. As parents we demand that the government do its job to protect our children from hidden dangers."

An Act Concerning Safe Toys, sponsored by the legislature's Environment Committee, would phase out priority toxic chemicals from children's products.

While recent media attention on the toy recalls has focused attention on lax laws in China, a big part of the problem is that US regulations do not protect children from a full range of toxic products, including those manufactured in the US.

"We like to think that someone, somewhere in our government is testing chemicals thoroughly to make sure they are safe for consumers and for workers before they can be used," said **Judy Sparer, Certified Industrial**

Hygienist, Lecturer in Public Health at Yale University. "But they don't. Chemicals are assumed to be innocent until proven guilty. Even in the 21st century we are discovering new health problems from things that we have been using for years only when illness develops. Without rigorous testing prior to widespread use, U.S. government agencies can't set standards or regulations to protect the health of consumers and workers. Instead we rely heavily on voluntary agreements and industry self policing."

"We have a huge problem with toxic chemicals and lead is the best known example," said **Kathy Murphy, Environmental Healthy Nurse representing the Connecticut Nurses' Association.** "Parents, and particularly parents in low income communities, have more than enough to do to keep their kids safe and shouldn't have to worry about toxics in products as well. We need laws to replace these toxic chemicals with safer alternatives if we are to avoid repeating the tragic history of lead paint and decades of children harmed."

Local retailer Peter Scott, who owns The Perfect Toy in Avon, agreed, "I'm in the business of selling toys because I want for kids to have fun and learn. The last thing I would want to do is provide products that harm children in any way. There's no room for "let the buyer beware" when it comes to the health and safety of children. While most toy manufacturers are very diligent about their quality control and safety standards, some toy companies have not been as diligent in controlling what is being brought into the retail market. While it is the responsibility of parents to make sure that their children are using age-appropriate toys, the onus of making sure that those products are free of contaminants and are 100% safe, is solely in the hands of the manufacturer."

An Act Concerning Safe Toys would follow and expand on progress in California, where their state legislature recently passed a bill to ban phthalates in children's toys.

"This legislation is practical and necessary," said **Sarah Uhl, Coordinator of the Coalition for a Safe & Healthy CT.** "Europe recently passed legislation to phase out 1,400 chemicals of highest concern. With safer alternatives available for so many uses, there is no reason why Connecticut should wait to take similar action."

The Coalition for a Safe & Healthy CT is a growing alliance of over two dozen organizations—health, labor, scientific, environmental, faith and community groups—working to prevent harm to human health and the environment from toxic chemicals.

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