Toys that spark a child’s creativity

This year’s ECSU study recommends easels, Hot Wheels

By MICHELLE FIRESTONE
Chronicle Staff Writer

WILLIMANTIC — With the holiday season in full swing, parents are heading to the store to shop for the perfect toys for their little ones.

They might want to take some advice from researchers at the Eastern Connecticut State University Center for Early Childhood Education.

The results of the annual TIMPANI (Toys that Inspire Mindful Play and Nurture Imagination) study were revealed during a press conference at Eastern’s Center for Early Childhood Education Monday morning.

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Easels, Hot Wheels top ECSU study

Connecticut PIRG report warns of dangerous toys

By MICHELLE TUCCITTO SULLO
New Haven Register

With the holiday shopping season in gear, a public interest advocacy group is warning consumers about potentially hazardous toys.


A sheriff’s badge playset had high levels of lead, while a Jake and the Neverland Pirates tambourine had high levels of chromium, according to the report. The organization found high levels of phthalates in items such as a Hello Kitty bracelet and hair clip set, a rubber duck and Dora the Explorer backpack, the report shows.

Lead, chromium and phthalates all can have adverse health impacts on a child’s development, according to ConnPIRG. The organization also found examples of small toys that pose a choking hazard, extremely loud toys that threaten children’s hearing and powerful toy magnets that can cause serious injury if swallowed.

Sean Doyle, campaign organizer with ConnPIRG, said the organization’s message is we need to protect children from hazardous toys.

“We once again found toys that could harm or poison a child,” Doyle said. “While progress has been made, there are still hazardous products out there. Some of the most dangerous hazards are invisible — the toys that contain substances like lead and phthalates.”

To determine if a toy presents a potential choking hazard, Doyle urged parents of young children to use an empty toilet paper tube — if a toy fits through the tube, or has small parts that can fit through the tube, it is a choking hazard and should be avoided for children under the age of 3, he said.

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said at the press conference, “The message today is simple — one ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

Caregivers, when you give presents, remember there are unseen and less obvious hazards in toys, like chromium and lead.”

According to Blumenthal, some stores are doing a better job at not carrying toy products that have these chemicals.

“Toys are becoming safer, but only because consumers are demanding it,” Blumenthal said.

Blumenthal held up a balloon and noted how they are responsible for many choking cases.

“Right now, parents should be warned that holidays can turn into tragedy if they fail to supervise their children,” Blumenthal said. “Everything a small child touches likely ends up in their mouth.”

Over the past six years, stronger rules have helped get some of the most dangerous toys and children’s products off the market, according to ConnPIRG. Rules put in place by the 2008 Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act tightened lead limits and phased out phthalates. The Consumer Product Safety Commission’s September ban on small, powerful toy magnet sets is also an important step forward, ConnPIRG said.

“Unfortunately, the federal government and the Consumer Product Safety Commission have not gone far enough to restrict toxic chemicals in toys,” said Anne Hulick, the coordinator for the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut.

Dr. Steven C. Rogers, an attending physician at the CCMC emergency department, said last year 256,000 children were treated in emergency rooms last year for toy-related injuries.

“The most deadly injuries are usually due to choking hazards like small toy accessories intended for older children,” he said.

Most incidents take place in the home, according to Rogers, who urged parents to pick age-appropriate toys for their children and supervise them closely while they play.

“The best gift you can give your child is a loving and safe environment — slow down and play with them, that is what they will remember,” Rogers said.

Martin Gavin, president and CEO at CCMC, urged parents to think about the entire family when buying gifts.

“What might be appropriate for a 9-year-old might be a hazard for a younger sibling,” Gavin said.

To read the full Trouble in Toyland report, visit ConnPIRG’s web site at conpirg.org. Parents can visit toyasafetytips.org for more information on specific toys and for tips on shopping for safe toys.

The Toy Industry Association, in a press release Monday, indicated all toys sold in the country, no matter where they are produced, are highly regulated by the federal government and must meet more than 100 safety requirements. The association was critical of the Trouble in Toyland report’s testing methods and asserts many of the items mentioned are not even toys and therefore not regulated by the same safety standards that toys must meet.

The association has information on toy safety and recalls, along with tips for parents, at www.ToyInfo.org.

“Toysafety is the top priority of the toy industry and we welcome responsible individuals and organizations in joining our year-round efforts to protect children at play,” said association President and CEO Carter Keithley.

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