



# What Docs Should Know About... Consumer Product Safety

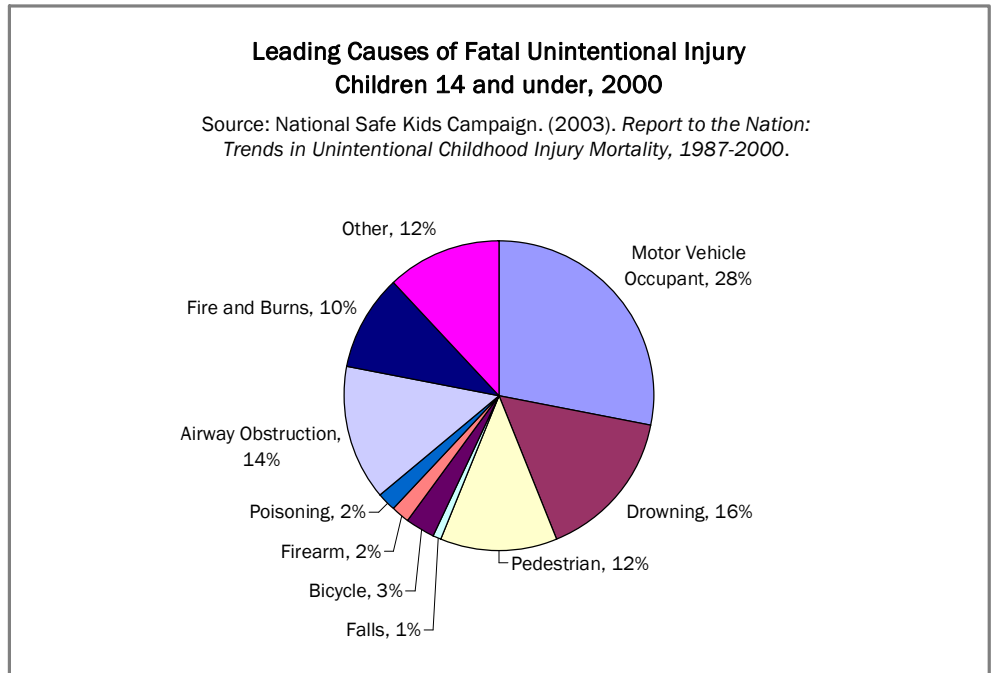
www.DocsForTots.org

## Child-related products, including some toys, are potential hazards to children's health.

- There are more than 5,600 child deaths every year due to unintentional injury, and the highest rate of unintentional injury-related deaths is among children under the age of one.<sup>1</sup>
- Specific dangers include: choking hazards; strangulation (cords and strings); projectiles (guided missiles and similar flying toys); excessively loud toys; toxic materials; sharp edges on toys, particularly those that may become exposed due to wear-and-tear; and electric toys that are not properly constructed.<sup>2,3</sup>

## Different products present different hazards at different ages.

- For infants, walkers are of special concern. Based on the information that approximately 8,800 children under the age of 15 months were treated in emergency rooms for injuries associated with infant walkers in 1999 alone, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended a ban on the manufacture and sale of mobile infant walkers in 2001. This recommendation came after the extensive use of warning labels, public education, stair gates and adult supervision of walkers had proved inadequate in



preventing injuries, suggesting that certain products can remain on the market even if they have been demonstrated to be unsafe.<sup>4</sup> Organizations such as the AAP and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) offer advice and guidelines on numerous clothing and nursery items, including cribs and crib bedding, children's sleepwear, toy chests, and play pens.

- For preschoolers and older children, toys may pose the greatest danger. In 2003, more than 200,000 people were treated in emergency rooms for toy-related injuries, and at least 11 children under age 9 died from those injuries. Choking on small parts, small balls and balloons is the leading cause of toy-related deaths and injuries.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National SAFE KIDS Campaign. (2003). *Report to the nation: Trends in unintentional childhood injury mortality, 1987-2000*. Author: Washington, D.C. [http://www.usa.safekids.org/content\\_documents/nskw03\\_report.pdf](http://www.usa.safekids.org/content_documents/nskw03_report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. (nd). *For kids' sake: Think toy safety*. Author: Washington, D.C. <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/281.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. PIRG Education Fund. (2004). *Trouble in Toyland: The 19th annual survey of toy safety*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. PIRG Education Fund. <http://www.vpirg.org/pubs/Trouble%20in%20Toyland%202004%20Final.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention. (2001). Policy Statement: Injuries associated with Infant Walkers. *Pediatrics*, 108, 790-792.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. PIRG Education Fund. (2004). *Trouble in Toyland: The 19th annual survey of toy safety*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. PIRG Education Fund. <http://www.vpirg.org/pubs/Trouble%20in%20Toyland%202004%20Final.pdf>.

## **The U.S. government and industry representatives are committed to ensuring that toys and other products used by children and families are safe.**

- The CPSC, an Independent Federal Regulatory Agency, was created in 1972 by Congress under the Consumer Product Safety Act, with the mandate to protect the public “against unreasonable risks of injuries associated with consumer products.” The agency operates in 5 main areas: developing voluntary standards with industry; enforcing mandatory standards or banning consumer products; recalling products; researching potentially hazardous products; and educating the public.<sup>6</sup>
- The Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association (JPMA) is a national trade organization of companies that manufacture and/or import infant products, including cribs, strollers, and bedding. JPMA offers a Certification Program to help parents select safe products. For information on certified products, visit the JPMA Web site at: [http://www.jpma.org/consumer/CertificationProgram/Certification\\_Program.htm](http://www.jpma.org/consumer/CertificationProgram/Certification_Program.htm).
- According to the Toy Industry Association (TIA), toy designers draw on information from parents, psychologists, educators, and child development specialists to develop toys that are age-appropriate. While the standards established by the toy industry are voluntary, the TIA strongly encourages adherence. The TIA also has a website designed specifically to help parents learn about toy safety: <http://www.toy-tia.org>.

## **Recalls are the primary method through which the CPSC and the toy industry alert the public that a toy or product may not be safe.**

- The CPSC recalls products that are deemed to pose a significant risk to consumers. The CPSC posts information about all recalls on their website. It is also possible to join an e-mail subscription list to receive information about recalls as they are issued by filling out an on-line form at <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.asp>.
- Consumer knowledge of recalls is not necessarily sufficient. Many consumers who buy a product that is later recalled do not ever find out about the recall.<sup>7</sup> The CPSC points out that inadequate labeling on toys leads to consumers not being able to determine if they own a product that has been recalled.

## **While consumer product safety has improved, consumers still need to be educated and aware.**

- While the Internet is becoming an increasingly popular way to shop for toys, online toy retailers are not required to provide the same safety warnings that are required on the packaging of toys in stores. The CPSC does not require choke hazard warnings on websites, despite the fact that the products being sold may legally require those warnings.<sup>8</sup>
- CPSC is also concerned that over-labeling of toys may dilute the message, which means that parents must become educated consumers.<sup>9</sup>

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## **Docs can get involved by educating families about toy and product safety, by helping parents become educated consumers, and by advocating for stronger safety requirements.**

### **Additional Resources for Docs:**

- American Academy of Pediatrics, <http://www.aap.org>
- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, <http://www.cpsc.gov/index.html>
- Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association, <http://www.jpma.org>
- National SAFE KIDS Campaign, <http://www.safekids.org/>
- U.S. Public Interest Research Group – Toy Safety, <http://uspirg.org/uspig.asp?id2=24631>.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. (nd). *Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved 6 July 2006 from <http://www.cpsc.gov/about/faq.html>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. PIRG Education Fund. (2004). *Trouble in Toyland: The 19th annual survey of toy safety*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. PIRG Education Fund. <http://www.vpirg.org/pubs/Trouble%20in%20Toyland%202004%20Final.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

