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Toxic Toys Still an Issue As Tougher Safety Law Nears

Get the Lead Out campaign offers free lead-testing kits

McAllen, TX – Children’s health and safety advocates today offered free lead-testing kits to parents, and childcare centers warning that millions of toxic toys are still in homes and new ones may flood store shelves during the last holiday season before tough, new federal toy safety standards go into effect on Feb. 10.

They also urged Texas to pass even stiffer laws dealing with lead levels in children’s products and to require responsible disposal of dangerous items.

“Despite the recall of millions of toys containing dangerous lead levels, only a small percentage of toys were returned to manufacturers. Either parents didn’t get the news, or didn’t understand the danger. We want to raise awareness and to help parents and child care providers get these toxic items out of the hands of children” said Rick Garcia, whose law firm, Garcia & Karam, brought the campaign to South Texas and is offering the free testing kits. The kits can be obtained through the firm’s website, www.garciakaram.com.

The offer is part of an initiative by legal, medical, child care, environmental and manufacturing groups called “Get the Lead Out,” aimed at eliminating lead toxic chemical threats to children. Garcia was joined by representatives of the United Steelworker’s “Women of Steel” advocacy group, and the Children’s Environmental Health Initiative at today’s news conference.

“Major concerns remain that dangerous toys are still in the pipeline. While an estimated 25 million toys have been recalled, the new law banning their re-sale doesn’t go into effect until February. We have to ask ourselves, where are these toys now? Are they being resold by thrift stores, over the internet or sent to foreign countries? Are they being disposed of properly in hazardous waste landfills?

“And most importantly, does the federal law go far enough? Stricter legislation has been proposed in 29 states. We believe Texas must join them, and we will be discussing our concerns with local representatives,” he said.

The lead test involves simply swabbing a toy with a special substance. If the swab turns pink, there is sufficient lead in the toy to pose a danger if placed in the mouth, said Julie Lidstone, with “Women of Steel” in Beaumont, TX. The organization has been working to raise public awareness about lead dangers, including training parents and childcare workers to use the kits.

“Lead is toxic and can cause serious health problems, especially in children. Excessive amounts of lead in the bloodstream can cause neurological damage, loss of I.Q points, brain damage and death,” she said.

“This is a problem created by failed U.S. trade policies that send U.S. jobs – but not U.S. quality standards – overseas,” Lidstone said, adding, “Countries with toxic air and toxic water produce toxic goods.”

The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act was the first major overhaul of product safety legislation in the U.S. since the 1970s. Among other things, the law lowers acceptable lead levels for paint or surface coatings on children’s products from the current standard of 600 ppm (parts per million) to 90 pm, within one year; and lowers acceptable lead content in children’s products to 100 ppm , within three years.

But many states are saying that’s not good enough, Garcia said, noting that the American Academy of Pediatrics maintains there is no safe level for lead when it comes to children.

“When the State of Washington passed a law in March reducing allowable levels of lead in toys to 90 ppm by July 2009, Mattel and Hasbro complained that half of all Fisher-Price’s toys could not pass this standard,” Garcia said. “This should give parents pause. If any level of lead is dangerous, why are we allowing toys with up to 100 ppm lead content to be sold for three more years? Is it really too much to ask that children not be given playthings that could harm their developing brains? Why are we fooling around with substances we know may impair children for life?”

“Texas needs to follow the lead of Washington State and others in setting even stricter standards for children’s toys if we are serious about children’s health,” he said.

He also noted that currently there are no nationally accepted procedures governing the disposal or recycling of toxic materials. “We need to look at the whole picture. We can’t get these dangerous toys out of the hands of children, only to have them endanger the water they drink by having them leach out of landfills,” he said.