

# TOYS OF TERROR

Poisonous dolls. Strangling yo-yos. Toxic trucks. Every year, thousands of kids get injured by the toys meant to delight them. What is being done to stop this? **BY LAUREN TARSHIS**



**AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:** What is the purpose of regulation?

**W**ith its sweet blue eyes and chubby cheeks, My Sweet Baby Cuddle Care Baby Doll was just about the cutest thing on Walmart's shelves last year. With the flip of a switch, the doll would cough and its cheeks would glow pink, as if it had a fever. Kids could then examine the doll using a thermometer and stethoscope, and cuddle it to make it feel all better.

Sweet, right?  
Actually, more like *ouch*.

It turned out that a hidden **defect** in My Sweet Baby's electrical system could cause the doll to become burning hot. Two kids suffered burned and blistered fingers before the dolls were yanked from Walmart's shelves and destroyed.

### Chomping Jaws

It might seem shocking that objects designed to delight a child could actually cause harm. But last year, a staggering 257,000 kids had to be rushed

to hospital emergency rooms with toy-related injuries. Every year, dozens of toys are **recalled** because they are dangerous. There were the sweet-looking baby dolls made from toxic plastic. There were Hello Kitty whistles with pieces that could break off and lodge in a child's windpipe. And who could forget the Cabbage Patch Snacktime Kids? Their powerful mechanical jaws, designed to chomp on plastic food, were also good at chomping on fingers and hair.

The good news is that most toys sold in the United States are perfectly safe. By law, toy manufacturers must follow **stringent** safety guidelines for every toy they sell in the U.S. That slick red fire engine your little brother vrooms across the kitchen floor? Its shiny paint had to be tested for lead (which causes brain damage in children) and other toxic chemicals before it

**LAWN DARTS** caused thousands of injuries.



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KENNY KEMP/THE CHARLESTON GAZETTE/AP IMAGES

could be sold. Its siren could not be so loud that it could damage his fragile ears. It could not have sharp edges capable of scratching his skin or poking his eyes, or small pieces that he could break off, stick in his mouth, and choke on.

Dozens of toy-safety standards, covering everything from baby rattles to motorized scooters, help protect kids from harm. In addition, every toy for kids under 12 must be sent to a toy-testing laboratory before it is approved for sale. Toy testers drop toys to make sure they don't shatter. They use sensors that can **detect** small amounts of lead or other hazardous materials. And they ensure that the toys do not easily catch on fire.

### Toughest Standards

So with all these **regulations**, how does a toy like My Sweet Baby Cuddle Care doll wind up in Walmart? Walk down the toy aisle at any superstore and the answer is clear:

There are just lots and *lots* of toys to keep track of. American **retailers** sell not hundreds but thousands of different kinds of toys.

**ATOMIC ENERGY LAB** had small amounts of radioactive materials. It was sold briefly in the early 1950s.



YIKES!



**WATER YO-YOS** were banned in some states because they can wrap around a child's neck.

**MY SWEET BABY CUDDLE CARE DOLL** was one of about a dozen toys recalled in 2014.



Enforcing toy-safety laws is the job of a U.S. government regulatory agency called the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), which was established in 1972. Though strict **standards** are in place, it's difficult for the CPSC to make sure that every toy maker follows the rules. Part of the challenge is that about 80 percent of American toys are **manufactured** in factories in China. These factories are supposed to follow U.S. standards, but some do not. Also, toy-testing laboratories can't always predict what will cause injuries once a toy is in the hands of its young owner; some flaws are not discovered until a toy has been on the shelves for months.

Some are calling for the government to do more to protect kids. The CPSC needs more money for inspections, they say. Others point out that the U.S. has some of the toughest toy-safety standards in the world. Sure, some toys have dangerous flaws, but thousands of kids are injured each year because of how they *use* toys—riding scooters without helmets and pads, for instance, or playing with toys meant for older children.

And there is not a whole lot the CPSC can do about that. ●

## ESSAY

# Popular Magnets Banned Forever

Buckyballs, the once-popular desk toys, were banned after thousands of kids got hurt. Problem is, they were never meant for kids. **BY KRISTIN LEWIS**

**F**ive years ago, Buckyballs were the “it” toy. Buckyballs are extremely strong magnets that can be arranged into all sorts of shapes. Office workers kept them on their desks. Parents stuck them on the fridge. The toys, which were meant for adults, were marketed as “stress relievers.” They were cool. Fun. Harmless.

Or were they?

### Ripped Intestines

Turns out, Buckyballs and similar products can be deadly in the clutches of children. If swallowed, the powerful magnets cling to each other in the intestines, where they can cause major damage—including ripping right through intestinal walls—resulting in injuries as severe as gunshot wounds.

Between 2009 and 2013,

some 2,900 children and teenagers required medical attention because they had ingested at least one high-powered magnet, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). One child died. Another had to have most of his intestines removed. (It should be noted that many household items such as ovens, kitchen knives, and dryers are statistically more injurious than Buckyballs.)

### Banned and Recalled

In 2012, the CPSC demanded that Buckyballs and similar products be banned and recalled and that money be refunded to customers. At first, Maxfield & Oberton, the company that makes Buckyballs, refused to issue a recall. The toys, after all, had **prominent**

labels warning to keep the magnets away from kids. The CPSC **countered** that clearly the warning labels were not working and child safety had to come first.

Outraged fans took to social media to protest. Many started buying up as many Buckyballs as they could. Meanwhile, the CPSC reached out directly to retailers. Barnes & Noble, Brookstone, Bed Bath & Beyond, and several other stores agreed to issue their own recalls and stop selling the magnets. As a result, Maxfield & Oberton went out of business.

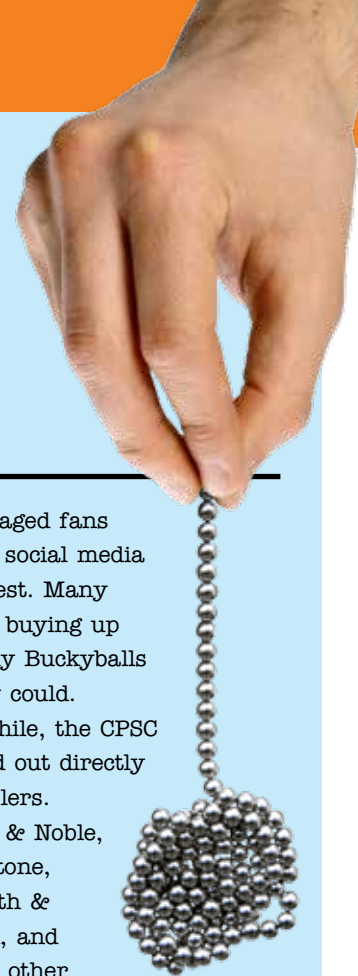
Yet the saga did not end there. In 2013, the CPSC filed a lawsuit against Craig Zucker, the CEO of Maxfield & Oberton. The suit held him personally and financially responsible for the harm his products caused. The suit was settled last May.

It is now illegal to sell or manufacture Buckyballs in the United States. ●



**Craig Zucker and the warning label that came with Buckyballs.**

ORAU.ORG (ATOMIC ENERGY LAB); FOTOSEARCH/GETTY IMAGES (YO-YO); CPSC.GOV (CUDDLE CARE DOLL); CAROLYN KASTER/AP IMAGES (CRAIG ZUCKER); GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (HAND); CHRIS SWEDA/MCT/NEWSCOM (BUCKYBALLS)



## WRITING CONTEST

What is the role of the Consumer Product Safety Commission? Was the CPSC right to ban Buckyballs? Explain. Use information from both texts to support your answer. Send your response to **TOY CONTEST**. Five winners will get *Doll Bones* by Holly Black.

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