Clean Toys, Green Toys and Toys Made Close to Home – 2013
(The Truth About What’s in our Children’s Toys & How to Avoid the Dangers)

***LATEST INFO – The 2013 Trouble in Toyland Report, an annual U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) survey of toy safety, is out. Among a load of other findings, according to USA Today, “Among the worst offenders: The Captain America Soft Shield, for ages 2 and older, contains 29 times more lead than allowed by law.” PDF REPORT Here: Trouble in Toyland

Author’s Note: Due to there being an abundance of information that I want to share with you, I have divided this article into 4 parts to make for easier and organized reading. Part 1: The Truth About the Quality of a lot of Toys and the Danger to our Kids, Part 2: What to Look for Before Buying/Buying Tips, Part 3: Great, Safe Toys and Toy Companies! Part 4: The Chemicals to Look Out For (I put this last as I think the other 3 parts are more important to know about first!)

Part 1: The Truth About the Quality of a lot of Toys and the Danger to our Kids

Unfortunately, in the past years, there have been many toy recalls, due to the high amounts of chemicals and heavy metals found in toys on store shelves. Some good has come from these recalls in that both the European Union and, as of August 2011, the United States have changed their toy regulations, making them more strict and demanding. These toxic substances, for which these countries are tightening their laws against, have been proven to make people sick. I will outline the specifics of the chemicals and heavy metals in part 4 of this article. Though there are now tighter regulations, there are still things that parents need to lookout for.

When it comes to toy regulations, the European Union’s new guidelines are more in depth and cover more chemicals than the guidelines that the United States just adopted. Also, the biggest manufacturer of children’s toys, China, does not have the same regulations for their own toys. Yes, they are supposed to follow the regulations of the companies that they manufacture toys for, but, as we have seen time and time again, they somehow get away with not always doing so. According to the Global Times, “In China, the snap check of toy products is mainly targeted at aspects like physical and mechanical properties and combustion performance, and items like chemical elements and heavy metals are usually ignored in the routine official checks.”

It’s not just China. Toys made in India and Taiwan have been cited as not always being safe. According to The Time of India, people should be careful of soft plastic teethers and...
plastic toys because they may contain chemicals dangerous to a child’s health. “The Delhi-based NGO Centre for Science and Environment has found that they contain dangerous phthalates – a family of chemicals that can cause serious health disorders such as asthma, skeletal defects, damage the male reproductive system and impair lungs of children besides causing allergies if exposed to beyond safe levels. While most developed countries regulate the presence of phthalates and some have enforced a complete ban, in India there is no regulation controlling their use. The study by CSE found over 45% of the samples exceeded internationally accepted safe limits for phthalates… “What is shocking is that many brands had labels like ‘non-toxic, safe for use,’” Chandra Bhushan, associate director at CSE, said. Many of the toys tested in India were made in either China or Taiwan.

Though the American guidelines have gotten more rigorous, they still allow for chemicals to be in our children's products. For example, the old regulation allowed for the lead content of children's products to be 300 parts per million. They are now lower, but still allowed to be present at 100 ppm, children's toys included (China Daily). Even though “there are standards in the U.S. for the amount of lead that can be used in children's toys, in some cases products are not in compliance and children are exposed to lead. An example of this occurred in 2006 when a young boy in Minnesota died from acute lead poisoning after ingesting a charm that did not comply with lead standards. In 2010, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), which is responsible for monitoring compliance with federal consumer safety product standards, made 24 recalls of infant and children's products that contained more than permitted levels of lead. Often the recalls involved imported items, though some products were manufactured in the U.S. (Consumer Product Safety Commission [CPSC], 2010b)” (Minnesota State Health Department). On top of this, just recently (Nov. 2011), the Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), revealed their findings that though it is now the law that toys contain no more than 100 ppm of lead, they found a toy on the shelves that contains 720 ppm! (That toy is a teething book titled Little Hands Love). And, as of November 26, 2013, PIRG has come out with new findings. What's scary is that things aren't changing in the toy industry. Loads of chemicals and hazardous heavy metals are still being detected on toys sold all over the U.S.

Then there are the pledges and promises that go unfulfilled. For example, in 2008, after finding high amounts of PVC in the toys and packaging of toys sold in their stores, Toys R Us promised to reduce their use of the chemical in the toys and packaging of toys they sell and pledged to offer more PVC free toys. However, fall 2010 testing done by the Center for Health, Environment & Justice, shows this did not happen. Not only did the majority of the toys still contain PVC, but only 1 of the 69 toys was labeled as containing PVC. The testing did show progress in reducing lead, but not eliminating it. On a side note, 98% of the toys tested came from China. They did not test for phthalates (A Report to the National Commission of Inquiry to Toxic Toys 5, 7-9). Here is a link for the full details and findings of the study: Toxic Toys R Us.

Another reason parents need to monitor what's in the toys their kids are playing with is that somehow, not all companies seem to be held to the same standards. For example, “The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act requires third-party testing of toys to ensure that toymakers large and small are adhering to strict new guidelines. The guidelines regulate how much lead, among other toxic chemicals, are allowed in toys. The guidelines were instated in the aftermath of massive toy recalls in 2007” (www.saferstates.com). Yet, in 2009, the Associated Press reported that “Mattel was granted an exemption from third-party testing. Instead the toymaker was able to do its own testing, in its own labs” (www.saferstates.com).

And finally, according to HealthyStuff.org, The U.S. government doesn't require full testing of chemicals before they are added to most consumer products. And once they are on the market, the government almost never restricts their use, even in the face of new scientific evidence suggesting a health threat... The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has limited data on existing chemicals including toxicity and exposure information.
EPA lacks data to ensure that potential health and environmental risks of new chemicals are identified. Chemical companies are not required to develop and submit toxicity information to EPA unless EPA issues a rule. EPA has used its authority to require testing for fewer than 200 of the 62,000 chemicals in commerce since 1979. For “new” chemicals, EPA estimates that only about 15 percent include health or safety test data; and for existing chemicals, only 5 chemical groups out of 62,000 have been restricted by EPA in 29 years"(HealthyStuff.org). Thus, we have to look out for ourselves!

Part 2: What to Look for Before Buying/Buying Tips

1. My number one piece of advice: Avoid toys made in China, Taiwan and India and buy toys made close to home!

2. The younger the child, the more careful you want to be about buying chemical free toys, as the toys are more likely to end up in a child’s mouth.

3. Check out HealthyStuff.org! “HealthyStuff.org is based on research conducted by environmental health organizations and other researchers around the country. The Ecology Center created HealthyStuff.org and leads its research and development. The Ecology Center is a Michigan-based nonprofit environmental organization that works at the local, state, and national levels for clean production, healthy communities, environmental justice, and a sustainable future” (HealthyStuff.org). For the past few years, HealthyStuff.org researched toys in order to help make parents aware of what’s in the toys their children are playing with. A list with the toys tested and their findings can be found on their website, along with other reports of tests done on toys.. I checked last year's list and was not pleased to see that some of the toys and 'green' bags my children own contain chemicals, including lead (they went directly into the trash!). I think that it is important to look at their 2110 link because many of these toys and items are still on the market. I am hoping that they will soon reveal findings for toys tested in 2011 as well. In addition, U.S. PIRG also tests toys every year and just came out with their 2011 list of hazardous toys. Please look at this list as well: Trouble in Toyland.

4. Do not buy inexpensive metal jewelry for a child. A significant amount of this jewelry contains cadmium, which is toxic if a child puts it into his/her mouth. “The amount of exposure depends on how much cadmium is in the piece of jewelry, and how often and for how long a child bites, sucks, or mouths it”(NYS Health Department). Lead can also be found in this type of jewelry. For more information on cadmium in toys, see the Environmental Working Group.

5. A note about lead: Lead is dangerous if ingested in any amount, and yet, even with the U.S.A.’s new safety regulations, it is still allowed to be present in our children's toys, clothing and other items. Children exposed to lead can suffer lower IQ, developmental delays or even death (U.S. PIRG). Also, “Lead exposure is most serious for young children because they absorb lead more easily than adults and are more susceptible to its harmful effects. Even low level exposure may harm the intellectual development, behavior, size and hearing of infants. During pregnancy, lead can cross the placenta and affect the unborn child. Female workers exposed to high levels of lead have more miscarriages and stillbirths”(Health Canada). Groups like HealthyStuff.org, CPSC, PIRG and children's health groups have found high levels of lead paint on toys, as well as in vinyl lunchboxes, bibs and some children's clothing (even some pieces of the Koala brand bibs and clothing have been found to contain lead). Also, the recyclable bags that are sold at Toys R Us were tested and contain lead. This is all the more reason to buy ORGANIC clothing, bibs and bags! It was just this past October, 2013 that Walmart jewelry (children's and adult's) were found to have high levels of lead.

6. To some extent, as with anything else, you get what you pay for. If you are buying dollar store toys, the chances are great that they aren't safe. Why? These toys are being made with the cheapest materials possible and are almost always made in China.
7. Just because a product is attached to a ‘kid friendly’ name, such as Disney or Sesame Street, does not mean the toy is safe. Toys attached to both names have been recalled and have been found to contain chemicals when tested by independent testing companies.

8. Download U.S. PIRG’s Toy Safety application to your smart phone to take shopping with you!

Part 3: Great Toys!

Below are a couple of different resources. I have compiled a list of toy companies who take making safe toys for kids to heart. They are all environmentally conscious, they all offer toys that stimulate a child’s imagination, and they all produce toys that I trust to be played with by my own children. A lot of the toys sold by these companies can be purchased directly from the company or from Amazon. At the end of this section I also provide two links to lists of toys not made in China.

First, we’ll start with products chosen by GoodGuide, a consumer advocate for healthy and sustainable products. “After evaluating 40 leading brands of toys, GoodGuide recommended four companies as this year’s (2009) greenest options, Plan, North Star, Haba, and Green Toys” (The Independent).

“GoodGuide’s testing includes analyzing materials for type of plastics, sources of wood, toxicity of paints and coatings. Also considered in the ratings is the companies’ energy use, environmental management, health and safety programs, labor rights, and transparency”(The Independent).

The following 4 toy companies “stand out for their commitment to putting the environment and child safety ahead of cost cutting,” according to GoodGuide:

“Plan Toys uses certified, organic rubberwood (not producing latex) for its wooden toys with chemical-free kiln drying, non-formaldehyde glue, and non-toxic water-based dyes. The factory is solar powered and uses low-emission biofuels. Products made in Thailand are recognized by the Thai Environment Institute’s “Green Label” for low environmental impact. Top toys include mushroom kaleidoscopes, xylophone, doll house furnishings, and adaptive toys for children with special needs” (The Independent). These toys are made in Thailand, Japan and the U.S.A. www.plantoys.com

Pure Play Kids is owned by The Grant Family. Mike says that before kids, he and Tania had given little thought to toys. After they had their first child, and people dutifully gave them giant mounds of plastic, battery-powered toys, they started thinking. After a bit of time, they had had enough with loud and self-moving plastic toys robbing their son of his opportunity to explore and learn by using his hands to move things, his voice to make sounds, etc. At the same time, millions of Chinese-made toys were recalled for high lead content and other safety issues. They owned a few of the recalled items; they condemned everything they owned and rethought toys. Mike and Tania sought something different, better, safer and sustainable for their young child. It was a frustrating and international search. Then the light bulb went off. There were plenty of other parents engaged in the
same frustrating search for better toys, and they decided to make that search easier by building a business around battery-free, creative, TV-free products. Pure Play Kids was born (Pure Play Kids). The Grants have started designing their own awesome toys which are being made in Tennessee. See their selection here: Pure Play Kids

![Plan Toys' very own Wooden Fire Truck – Made in the U.S.A.](image)

**North Star Toys** was started by Tim and Connie Long in 1979, just about the same time they started their family. **North Star Toys** are made from sustainably-managed wood or wood scraps from local cabinet makers. The 32-year-old company assembles all of its toys in New Mexico, USA, which runs on 100% renewable energy. Toys are finished with a food-grade mineral oil and paints are certified lead-free and nontoxic. Top toys include “rollie” cars, trucks, dinosaurs, and ducks, and animal collections“ (The Independent). The people at North Star believe that Children deserve beautiful, functional toys, which is why they create their toys for kids, not just of this generation, but for generations to come; they want to protect our planet for these future generations. Environmental sustainability is a top priority for the toy makers, as is their concern for child safety when playing with toys. Their lumber comes from the US, and their parts follow the federal and voluntary guidelines governing small parts, sharp points, and chemical make-up. Their toy finishes are safe, as the toys are simply coated with a non-toxic, food grade mineral oil which meets or exceeds requirements by the USFDA, US Pharmacopeia, US Dept. of Agriculture and is certified Kosher and Pareve (North Star Toys). [www.northstartoys.com](http://www.northstartoys.com)  ***** Five Stars from my children! My daughter will be receiving the Busy Boat for Christmas!

**Green Toys** are made mostly of plastic recycled milk containers, made of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) that is reprocessed. An independent, third-party laboratory tests products to ensure there are no traceable amounts of phthalates or BPA. The toys have no paint and packages are recycled corrugated boxes without plastic, cellophane or twist-ties. Top toys include a recycling truck, garden kit, sand play set, and tools” (The Independent). We have lots of Green Toys’ toys and my kids love them! Their current favorites are the school bus and the tea set. Made in the U.S.A. [www.greentoys.com](http://www.greentoys.com)  ***** Five Stars from my children!

**Haba Toys** employs renewable energy to power its German facilities with photovoltaics and wood scrap to generate heat. The company uses water-based stains and finishes on its wooden toys utilizing an environmental management program at the factory. Most toys are made in Germany and listed on its website, with some manufacturing in China (some of the plush toys). Top toys include the Leaning Tower of Pisa and Middle Eastern building set” (The Independent). We also have a lot of Haba toys in our home and we love them! [www.haba.de](http://www.haba.de)  ***** Five Stars from my children!

**More Green Toys, Chosen by Me!**

**Apple Park** “was founded in San Francisco with a vision to create environmentally responsible and luxurious products for babies and children. Apple Park’s Picnic Pals were
inspired by classic children’s toys, reinvented with the finest eco-friendly materials available. From a family of experienced toy makers, Apple Park’s founder, Angie Ting, set out to create the line of eco-friendly products with her two young children in mind. Her concern for the health of babies, the environment and social issues derived from conventional farming, were her inspiration. She formed a partnership with Pate International, a highly respected San Francisco design firm known for their environmentally conscious designs, to create the brand in 2009. Susan Pate, along with her daughter Chloe Pate, helped her realize her dream and together they created Apple Park” (Apple Park).  

http://www.applepark.com/  PLEASE NOTE: These toys ARE made in China. However, I have had conversations with and have met the owners, who take making their toys safe VERY seriously. They have their own factory, have strict standards that they test and stand by and have never had any toys recalled anywhere.

“Eco-Kids is a line of art supplies that gives children the tools to create using non-toxic, natural ingredients and environmentally friendly packaging” (Eco-Kids). They are made in the USA and include products such as play dough (eco dough), finger paints, crayons, and paste. My son loves their eco dough and paint! http://www.ecokidsusa.com/  ***** Five Stars from my children!

**Artterro** was started and is owned by Forrest Espinoza and Jennifer Conn, two artists and mothers from Madison, WI. They started Artterro because they believe everyone is born creative. Sometimes the pace of our modern lives keeps us from making time for art; that’s where Artterro comes in. Their goal is to make it fun, easy and affordable for people to create art with family and friends. Each Artterro eco art kit is a collection of beautiful, natural materials and creative project ideas. They offer a fun, engaging art experience that delights creative kids and grown-ups alike! Their kits are assembled at Goodwill Industries of South Central Wisconsin, and not only is all of their packaging made of recycled materials, it can be upcycled into a beautiful, customizable frame for your finished artwork. The kits feature high-quality natural materials like 100% wool felt, 100% post-consumer waste decorative handmade paper, glass and wooden beads, cotton thread, hand batiked cotton fabric, and copper wire. All of their packaging inserts, bands that wrap around the boxes and marketing materials are printed on recycled paper (most of it 100% PCW) using vegetable based inks and renewable energy. They also donate their products to Buddy Cruise, a non-profit that puts on family conferences for individuals with Down syndrome. 

http://artterro.com/  ***** Five Stars from me (my daughter is too young to create with these yet; my son will be getting his first kit soon – not sure who is more excited, him or me!)

Made in Italy, **Quercetti** “is constantly committed to supplying safe non-toxic products using only certified materials. We are serious about the responsibility we have so all our products are tested by recognized external labs meeting the international toy safety regulations. We can even provide a Safety Assessment for any of our products. For all our printouts we use only FSC certified paper, made of pure ECF (Elemental Chlorine Free) cellulose and recycled fibers: for a low environmental impact, the inks employed in our off-set printing process are vegetable-based and we make no use of isopropyl alcohol” (Quercetti).  


**Green Start** by **Innovative Kids** is an “earth-friendly series made from 98% post-consumer recycled materials and is printed with eco-friendly ink. Each hardcover book’s simple, non-fiction content inspires children to love and respect the natural world, and the parent spread at the back of each book shows how easy it is to practice (and teach!) earth friendly habits right at home” (Innovative Kids). All of Innovative Kids products meets federal safety regulations.  

http://www.innovativekids.com/content/view/213/605/  

**Tegu** is a toy business founded to address unemployment, neglected natural and human resources, and the need for entrepreneurship in Honduras. They use natural and non-toxic materials. Honduras offers beautiful, globally unknown hardwoods which can be harvested
in a sustainable manner; these woods serve as their primary raw material. Their magnets are safely enclosed inside the wood and their coatings are water-based and non-toxic. In fact, you can view their CPSIA mandated General Conformity Certifications on their website (Tegu). These toys are so much fun and inspire creativity and imaginative play! They are unique in that each block has a magnet inside, adding a new dimension to block building. [http://www.tegu.com/store/](http://www.tegu.com/store/)

**Nova Natural** is a company that sells safe, natural toys from various small company artisans from both the U.S.A. and Europe to supply families with heirloom quality, non-disposable toys that support healthy lifestyles in balance with the environment. They really have a lot to offer for kids of all ages. Many of their products are wooden toys, though they also have play silks (which my kids love), dolls, and much more. [http://www.novanatural.com/](http://www.novanatural.com/)

**Author’s Note:** I often get asked about *Melissa and Doug* toys. I do like that they seem to try to make safer toys. I know that they are made in China, but that they do own their own facility there, so they do have more control than if they did not own it. I also know that they have had *toys recalled before* (in 2009), not in the USA, but in Canada, because, at the time, Canada had stricter toy regulations. One would hope that toys would be safe all around, not just to meet regulations, but to exceed them, not having any chemical or metal dangerous to human health. Their toys were also tested, in 2008, by HealthyToys, and ranked high for lead and PVC. The ratings were taken down after Melissa and Doug showed their own third party results because they did meet the current regulatory levels. My point, again, is that there shouldn’t be any chemicals to have to be concerned about.

In addition, here are two other helpful links:

**Toys made In America** – [http://www.toysmadeinamerica.com/](http://www.toysmadeinamerica.com/)

**Toys NOT made in China, separated by country** – [http://www.squidoo.com/toysnotfromchina](http://www.squidoo.com/toysnotfromchina)

Author’s Note: Because I know I have a lot of local, Long Island fans, I thought I’d let you know that you can buy Apple Park, Green Toys, Tegu and Green Start products at Healthy Alternatives in Babylon!

**Part 4: The Chemicals to Look Out For**

Below is a list of chemicals and heavy metals commonly found in children’s toys and products. I would like to tell you to look out for them, but you don’t always have any real
way of knowing what is in the toys you buy. Click on the name of the chemical/metal to see more about it.

**Cadmium** – According to the State Health Department of Minnesota, “Cadmium enters the body through ingestion or inhalation. With repeated exposure, cadmium can accumulate in the body, especially in the kidney and liver, **with potential of remaining in the body for several decades** and the kidney can be damaged after over-exposure to cadmium. Cadmium can also cause malformation of bone, bone loss or decrease in bone strength. Further, there is some limited evidence that cadmium is a neurotoxin and an endocrine disruptor (ATSDR, 2008). In animal laboratory studies, cadmium has been found to be absorbed more readily by younger animals (ATSDR, 2008). Children have more years to accumulate cadmium and to manifest related health effects, making cadmium in children’s products a concern.”

**PVC** – Also known as Vinyl – Connections have been made between exposure to this chemical to asthma, learning and developmental disabilities for both babies and the fetus, breast cancer, and reproductive health problems; dioxins released by PVC are known human carcinogens and endocrine disruptors. **Both inhaling and ingesting PVC is hazardous to our health** (Center for Health, Environment and Justice)!

**Lead** – According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, “Lead targets the nervous system in humans. It can result in weakness, increased blood pressure, anemia, and brain and kidney damage. High exposure levels can result in miscarriage or affect sperm production. Exposures to lead can affect development and behavior in children”(Minnesota State Health Department). Lead has been known to be found in paint, including wall paint and paint used on toys, dust, and jewelry. *You can buy home lead test kits to test the toys already in your home.*

**Formaldehyde** – This chemical can cause skin, eye and respiratory irritation. It has also been linked to nasal cancer and is a known carcinogen.

**BPA** – “The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey reports that reproductive and developmental changes have been found at high BPA dose levels in laboratory studies. In January 2010, the FDA reported that it, along with the National Toxicology Program (NTP), has some concerns about “the potential effects of BPA on the brain, behavior, and prostate gland in fetuses, infants, and young children.” (Food and Drug Administration [FDA], 2010a)"(Minnesota State Department of Health).

**Phthalates** – Laboratory tests have shown that phthalates can cause developmental and reproductive effects, kidney and liver damage, mortality and adverse effects on human reproductive and developmental outcomes. Phthalates are used to soften plastics, or increase mobility of other products. They are found in what seems like every man-made product, including “polyvinyl chloride (PVC), plastics, paints, cosmetics, wood varnish, and medical supplies to increase flexibility or improve other characteristics, such as durability. In addition to being in consumer products, phthalates are pervasive in the environment and have been found in food, drinking water, household dust, and indoor air (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry [ATSDR], 2002; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2010d; Consumer Products Safety Commission [CPSC], 2010a)"(Minnesota State Health Department).

**Decabromodiphenyl ether (decaBDE)** – This chemical is used as a flame retardant. It is typically found in household dust, so though it is not necessarily used in children's products, it is used in products around our home. I am curious if this and the next chemical described are ones found in the car seats, as I discussed in a previous post. This chemical has been found to be present in human adipose (fat) tissue, urine, breast milk, and blood. It has also been found in fish. Studies show that it is very possible that this toxin is cancer causing; there are also signs pointing to it having negative effects on the liver, thyroid and behavioral problems (Minnesota State Health Department).
1,2,5,6,9,10-Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD) – This chemical is used as a flame retardant. In testing done thus far, it has been found to harm the normal development of a fetus or child or cause other developmental toxicity; it effects the thyroid, and it has been found in human Adipose tissues, blood, breast milk and serum. Like the previous chemical, it is often found in household dust as well. (Minnesota State Health Department).

“When you know better, you do better.” – Maya Angelou

So please, think about buying clean, green and safe toys made close to home!

Works Cited


2 Responses to Clean Toys, Green Toys and Toys Made Close to Home – 2013

Heather says:
December 4, 2013 at 3:51 am

We don’t live in a perfect world and you might not be unable to control every toy your kid plays with. This being the case, it doesn’t hurt to teach your kids from early on NOT to put toys in their mouths! We start this teaching about when they start crawling, and the job is done long before the age of 2. (It might help that we don’t use pacifiers, I don’t know)

Replay

jmm2105Jolene says:
December 4, 2013 at 7:28 pm

It doesn’t matter if a kid never puts a toy in their mouth, these toxins can be introduced into the bloodstream via touching it and inhaling it. Well done article, have shared with my mama friends. I agree, we should NOT have to worry about ANY toxins and I wish that all companies would want to exceed those standards knowing that they are making products specifically for children.

Replay

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