

What the toy companies are saying ...

... about toys made in the USA:

The main reason is to be able to give a quality product that's safe for parents to buy for their families and I have full control of quality control here. If it's manufactured in another country we have to go to great expense to travel to that country, and when we're not there we can't see what's going on."

Patti Littwin
CEO/founder of the Ttalf Corporation and creator of Yackie Ball – a ball made for children who have disabilities to be able to play with other children

Why American? Several reasons. The primary reason was to support American manufacturers. My primary line of work is as an organizational consultant to manufacturing companies. I see how sending all of our manufacturing overseas is hurting the American middle class. I wanted to build a company to prove that we could make great products here in America and still be profitable. I also wanted to ensure high quality."

Paul Marciano
Founder of the ColorMe Company, a child psychologist with a doctorate from Yale University

We have full control over quality assurance of what we're buying through final inspection. Eighty percent of the toys sold in our country are made somewhere else. It already comes in a box shrunk wrap ready to go on shelf. Whoever is importing that toy - has lot of faith."

Scott Cavagnaro
President of Lauri Toys and the Smethport Toy Co.

Being a domestic supplier also offers us a competitive edge as we are able to respond to market conditions quickly and control our own destiny."

Christopher Thorpe
Spokesperson for Buffalo Games

We chose to manufacture in the U.S.A. as opposed to overseas because we feel it is our responsibility to help our local economy even though it is in a small way. We have always been horrified at the child labor situations in other countries and felt as though producing our products off shore would be a show of support to those countries that encourage those labor situations."

Sue Dennison
Roy Toy Manufacturing

We choose to make our products here in the U.S. to support our country by employing American workers and show the public what a bear factory is all about. We give educational, fun tours of our manufacturing facility to thousands of school children every year, as well as the public at large."

Angelica Murrieta
Stuffington Bear Factory spokeswoman

What's with all the recalls?

With the Christmas shopping season under way, toy companies that make their products in China are doing what they can to convince shoppers their products are safe.

By Karen Cotton
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Since June of this year, several toy companies have recalled millions of toys due to excessive amounts of lead paint. "When the Consumer Product Safety Commission learned that there were toys in violation of the lead paint ban that has been in place in the U.S. for 30 years, the agency increased its inspection of toys for lead paint violations," said Julie Vallese, a spokeswoman for the Consumer Product Safety Commission. "The number of recalls you are seeing for lead paint violations are the result of a commitment the agency has made to consumers."

In August, one of the largest toy manufacturers, Mattel, had three major recalls.

The CPSC, Vallese said, as well as the industry are conducting a top-to-bottom inventory inspection of toys on store shelves.

"The recalls you are seeing are the result of that commitment," Vallese said. "Toys in the market now have and are continuing to be under a level of inspection and scrutiny not seen in past years."

Local parent Rich Trujillo said the toy recalls worry him because his two-year-old daughter, Becca, puts everything into her mouth.

His four-year-old son, Jeremy Trujillo, owns the "Cars" vehicles from the Pixar animated movie.

As many as 253,000 units of Sarge die-cast cars were part of a Mattel recall in August, according to the CPSC's Web site.

"A lot of his cars had chunks of paint that were gone," Rich said. "He plays rough with his toys, if the paint has lead in it, who knows where it's going."

Many of the products being recalled are coming from China, a major hub of toy manufacturing.

Toys are a billion dollar industry.

With the holiday shopping season already underway, toy companies who make their products in China are doing what they can to convince consumers that their products are safe and many are saying that they are taking extra measures to test their toys.

Major toy company presidents have posted letters about their company's toy safety records on their Web sites.

The Toy Industry Association, which is the watchdog of toys, has an entire section of their Web site devoted to questions about toy safety.

When the organization was approached for comment in this story, they referred all questions to the Toy Industry Association's Web site, www.tia.org. The header on their toy safety Web site simply states "Toys are Safe."

American made toy makers are taking advantage of the recalls to position themselves as a source for kid-friendly, safe toys. Many companies are seeing demand for their products tripled this holiday season.

But just because a toy is made in the U.S.A. doesn't mean parents should drop all precautions. The CPSC Web site, www.cpsc.gov, is a good resource for toy and product recalls.

That said, in 2007 the CPSC said there were 52 recalls from China, 9 from other countries and none from the U.S.A. The CPSC hasn't done the assessment for additional years.

According to the CPSC's Web site, only two toys that were manufactured in the U.S. were recalled in 2006.

But Jim Silver, a toy expert and a publisher of Toy Wishes, said, "The percent of toys made in the U.S. have the same recall rate as the toys that are made in China."

Toy Wishes magazine sets the industry standard of what the hottest toys are for the holiday season.

Silver explained that the rates of recalls from China are similar to those experienced from the United States 10 to 20 years ago.

"You can't go back into the past year because very few toys are made in America," Silver said.

When asked about the CPSC statistics that said there weren't any recalls from American made toys this year he said, "Yes, go back last year there were recalls. It's on their Web site."

Silver also maintained that comparing the safety associated with the manufacturing of toys in China with those made state-



FAQs about toy recalls

Q: What should parents do to make sure the toys their kids are getting or have are safe?

A: The greatest risk to children from toys are choking hazards, aspiration hazards and the connection of riding toys to motor vehicles. Parents should make sure the toys they are providing to their children are the right age grade, interest and skill level for that child. Parents should be label readers but not just read the labels but heed the warnings.

Q: Is there a way to find information about recalls in the past 50 years?

A: The CPSC was established in 1973, so there would not be product recalls reaching back that far. All the recalls announced by the agency going back to 1973 can be found on our Web site (www.cpsc.gov).

Q: What are the primary safety hazards that normally happen when a toy is recalled? (choking, unsafe parts, etc.)

A: Choking, aspiration, strangulation some of the most common hazards that are connected to toy recalls.

Q: What kind of safety testing is necessary to sell toys in the U.S.A.?

A: No matter where the product is manufactured, it is the responsibility of the importer of record to make sure that product is compliant with U.S. safety standards. If a company learns that a product does have a safety hazard that company is obligated under the law to report to the CPSC.

Answers courtesy of Julie Vallese, spokeswoman for the Consumer Product Safety Commission



side isn't fair.

The toys currently manufactured abroad frequently involve plastics and complex technology as compared to U.S. toys such as crayons, board games and stuffed animals.

For its annual review of holiday toy offerings, the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle tested many of the toys that Toy Wishes magazine listed on the top dozen list.

This year's toy test also included American-made products and products made in Germany and Denmark. Some of the toys on the Toy Wishes top dozen list are made in China.

One such toy, Aqua Dots, has been pulled off the top dozen list after it was recalled Nov. 7.

Aqua Dots is a product made by Spin Master in China. If the product is swallowed, the chemicals on the dots produce the same chemical as in a date-rape drug and can cause serious injury or death to a child.

Both Rich and his wife, Jennifer, were familiar with Aqua Dots.

"We would have bought them this year," Rich said of his Christmas shopping plans. "They reminded me of Shrinky Dinks (and) Jeremy wanted them."

"He saw commercials about them after every cartoon and would say, 'I want that.'"

Jennifer said that the commercial looked like an infomercial.

For parents with older children, the concerns with recalled toys can differ.

"To an extent it bothers me. I always try to buy local, regional or American made. But, I buy toys with enjoyment in mind," said Amiee Reese, the mother of Clara, 8, and Owen, 5. "My kids are old enough that they're not going to chew on it. So the risk is overblown."

Her daughter chimed in, "Why would I chew on it?"

Clara was also aware of some of the latest recalls.

"I heard of Aqua Dots," she said. "They're on TV and there is some chemical on them that makes you sick. Some can glow in the dark."

Amiee added, "That's pretty freaky about the Aqua Dots. You just never know."

Silver, who chose the Aqua Dots as a top dozen toy and later pulled it from the list after learning about the recall, said, "There is no reason for that to happen. No excuse."

"Everyone has to go back to the drawing board and see when these items were tested to find out when the original test was and the glue wasn't on it, so how did this happen?"

Silver was referring to an alleged switch in the way the product was produced that could result in the release of toxins if ingested.

"This should not have happened," he said.

But the recalls don't spell doom for the toy industry, Silver maintains.

"The majority of parents aren't concerned. I'm in New York and went into Toys 'R' Us today and the store and the toy aisles were packed," Silver said. "I haven't heard the numbers yet, but I heard it was a pretty good weekend for toys."

The safety standards for toys are extremely high, he said.

"As a number one rule as a parent you must buy age-appropriate toys," Silver said. "I want to clarify this exactly - I'm not absolving the company with Aqua Dots from any blame in this."

"Yes, what happened was wrong, but I have to follow with question number two - again, I'm not taking blame from the manufacturer because the buck stops with them. (But) on an item that says ages four and older, it says do not eat."

"So, how did a 20-month-old eat a large quantity of them? Why did three to four of the initial cases that I've heard of (involve) kids two and are under eating large quantities of them?"

With all toys parents need to take more responsibility, he said.

"I don't think parents take the guidelines seriously enough," he said. "If you look at recalled items last year - a child swallowed the magnet at age three (when the magnet was listed for six and older, again the manufacturer took the blame, but parents need to follow age guidelines. But they don't do that."

Amiee said as a parent she already does that.

"We look at the age appropriateness of toys. We try to buy art or science based stuff, so it's not just toys," Amiee said. "We already make choices like that and do wooden toys and stay away from plastic or super commercialized stuff."

"I wouldn't get (Zizzle's) Spotz for Clara just because she liked it."

Spotz were another toy on the Top Dozen list that was made in China.

Scott Goldberg, a spokesperson for Zizzle said the company is doing everything it can to test all of their toys.

Silver said the CPSC is no doubt more vigilant about testing toys.

"They're testing spots on the toy, if 99 percent of toy passes, but if one spot doesn't pass, they recall on a toy," Silver said.

What this means for toy consumers and the toy industry is the price of toys will be going up.

"With better tests, prices will be going up because testing costs money," Silver said. "You will have an increase, not a large increase, but \$6.99 might be \$7.99."

For a higher-priced toy such as \$69.99 that rate should be the same and it would likely only increase a dollar.

"I can't draw percentage on it because a small item that costs \$100 and a large item costs \$20 can be anywhere from 10 percent to one percent," Silver said.

When asked if that cost increase is the same for a toy made in the U.S. versus a toy made in China Silver said, "Most items are made in China - aside from wooden games, a few stuffed animals - very few things are made here, so I can't answer that one yes or no."

What the companies are saying

God yes, and I'm happy that. A lot of people didn't focus on American made products until the recalls. Now I get thank you and e-mails thanking me I have an American mad product, especially a toy

Patti Littwin
CEO/founder of the Ttalf Corporation and creator of Yackie Ball - a ball made for children who have disabilities to be able to play with other children

Yes, we have seen an increase in sales. With all the recalls that have been happening more people are becoming increasingly conscious of where their products are made. Not only are they interested in where they manufactured, but also the materials are made."

Angelica Murrieta
Stuffington Bear Factory spokeswoman

Everything we make is a 30 percent increase. I do know if that's all reflects that we're made in the U.S. but we're going strong. It could be products, or we are, and they're just getting exposure out there

Ian Cooper
Senior Vice president for sales & Savit temporary tattoo compar

Yes, as we first predicted wholesale business has more than doubled and our Roy web site has gone up 50 percent, an unbelievable amount. We manufacture and Package all of our products 100 percent in Maine and use only raw materials from the U.S.A.

Sue Dennison
Roy Toy Manufacturing

First and foremost, our primary focus is on product quality products that stimulate children's creativity. Right now, our products produced primarily in Europe and Mexico with some toys sourced in Asia. No matter where in the world our toys are produced, all LEGO toys meet or exceed all mandatory government safety requirements and own high standards for safety and quality, as well."

Michael McNally
Spokesperson for LEGO, founded in Denmark in 1936

What local parents think about all the recent recalls

If my kid wants something made in China I'll still buy it, even though it's terrible to say that. But the Smart Cycle is made in China and it's on our Christmas stuff (list)."

Tina Lackey
Mother of Taryn, 9, and Paige, 4

It's hard to change your child's mind when your child wants a toy. When you're looking for the safest one present the toys to them that you know are safe, rather than letting your child pick one from a catalog or the TV. Encourage her to pick the right one."

Stacy Jenkins
Mother of Lexie, 4

We checked the ones that were specifically marked certain trains at the certain times they were manufactured and were considered high lead."

Steve Wood
Father of Chris, 8, and Nick, 10

I liked the crayons and Crayola art stuff that my kids played with during the testing because it kept them busy and they seemed happy, and it was artsy. I've always trusted the Crayola name. As far as I can remember senior will be the most Crayola has always been something good."

Jennifer Trujillo
Mother of Jeremy, 4, and Becca, 2

I am certain that the toys hitting the stores this holiday season will be the most rigorously tested in history

Mike Araten
President, chief operating officer of K'NEX, which also produces Brio and Lincoln Logs