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Recalled Toys Still Circulating

08.18.2007 | Culture and Society With the recent recall of more than 10 million toys, parents may think that danger has passed. But a new study by a University of Dayton researcher found that many recalled children's products are resold on online auction sites – often years after the initial recall – and may end up back in children's hands.

In an article published this month in the Injury Prevention journal, Keri Brown Kirschman found a significant number of recalled children's products and toys are being offered for sale through online auction sites, such as eBay, and are sold most of the time, continuing to keep unsafe products in circulation.

"Today we're thinking about Mattel, we're thinking of Fisher-Price, because the recalls are in the news, but three years from now, when we go online to buy toys, we won't be thinking about recalls," Kirschman said.

Kirschman, assistant professor of psychology specializing in child psychology and pediatric injury prevention, identified 141 recalled items including bassinets, playyards, baby walkers and safety devices, found the items offered in 190 online auctions, and for 30 days tracked their paths on eBay.

Her research, "Resale of recalled children's products online: an examination of the world's largest yard sale," also found:

- * Nearly 70 percent of the time, recalled items were sold typically after about six days online, placing other children at risk of injury.
- * Sellers were registered with eBay for an average of 19.8 months, and had 99.5 percent positive feedback ratings.
- * While eBay policy prohibits the sale of recalled products, enforcement appears to be lacking.
- * Many products were recalled several years ago, and were still in circulation through the online auction site.

Some of the recalls occurred due to documented deaths related to the product or because they placed children at risk of asphyxiation, electrical fire, laceration, bruising, falling or other hazards such as lead poisoning.

"I found a child's meal toy recalled for a choking hazard from 1992 for sale and I found other recalled items from the late 1990s," Kirschman said. "A concern for current Fisher Price and Mattel recalls is that these products will linger in second-hand venues long after the publicity dies down."

Among the products Kirschman found on online auction sites were the following examples of recalled children's products and toys. Links to the Consumer Product Safety Commission recall announcements and photos are included.

- * Initially recalled in 1997, Playyards have resulted in several documented deaths.
- * Safety 1st Cabinet and drawer latches were recalled in 2001 because a two-year-old child was able to open the cabinet, gained access to hazardous chemicals and received chemical burns in her mouth. Another child was injured by the spring in the latch.
- * TV Guards, designed to prevent a child from pulling a television over, were recalled in 1998 because several children had pulled televisions over on themselves with the "safety" device in place.
- * Fisher-Price Power Wheels were recalled in 2000 after several reports of the foot pedal sticking, with a three-year old receiving injuries from running into a house.
- * The Tek Nek Riding Vehicle was recalled in 2000 due to battery overheating which caused burns to two individuals.

Kirschman said some items were recalled due to high lead levels, similar to the recent recalls announced by Mattel and Fisher-Price.

Lead author Kirschman conducted the study in 2004 while a fellow at the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at the Columbus Children's Hospital. The study was co-authored by Gary A. Smith, director of the center.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, about 230,000 visits to emergency rooms annually are associated with injuries related to nursery products and toys. From 1999 to 2001, 149 deaths associated with nursery products were reported.

"It appears from my research that the mechanisms to prevent the resale of unsafe children's products are largely unsuccessful, because recalled items are sold most of the time," she said.

To reduce the number of recalled products on line, Kirschman made several recommendations:

- * Online auction sites should require that sellers sign a statement indicating that the product has not been recalled.
- * Sellers should be required to provide more information about the product in product listings including company name, model or serial numbers and where the product was purchased.
- * Online auction sites should more vigorously enforce their own policies prohibiting sale of recalled items through closer monitoring and prompt removal of such items from the site.
- * Direct links to product recall websites should be prominently displayed at the bottom of each product listing.

Kirschman said such measures would only address part of the problem. Decreasing the number of recalled products in circulation would help to stem the flow of potentially dangerous products at their sources, she said.

"Manufacturers should be required to be more aggressive in retrieval of recalled products and the Consumer Product Safety Commission should investigate alternative ways to advertise present and past recalls," she said.

In order help consumers identify recalled products, Kirschman also suggested that manufacturers should be required to change product names or colors following a recall.