

STATE SENATOR • HANSEN CLARKE • 1ST DISTRICT

# Clarke Press Release

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## **Sen. Clarke Warns Holiday Shoppers: Don't Buy Toxic Toys** *Calls for State to Ban Harmful Chemicals in Children's Toys*

LANSING -With consumers heading to stores this weekend for last-minute holiday shopping, State Senator Hansen Clarke (D-Detroit) today announced his intention to introduce legislation in the next few weeks that would ban the use of harmful chemicals such as phthalates and several types of heavy metals.

"I'm glad that Michigan has finally taken steps to ban the use of lead paint in children's toys, but there are other dangerous chemicals in these products that are also putting our kids at risk," said Clarke. "We simply cannot afford to put our children's health at risk by waiting to take action on banning these harmful chemicals."

Although legislation prohibiting the sale of toys with unsafe levels of lead is on the docket to be signed by Governor Jennifer M. Granholm soon, many toys containing lead can still be found on store shelves. The following toys pose a particularly high risk of lead exposure:

- Brush Your Teeth! Robot manufactured by Tatiti
- Dinner Party tea set and ceramic tea set manufactured by Starletz
- Elmo's Take-Along Card Games
- Bugs, construction equipment, and fairies bags manufactured by Tyrrell Katz
- My Pasture Play Set
- Go Diego Go manufactured by Nick Jr.

Research has shown that phthalates ("THAL-ates," chemicals found in most soft plastics) accumulate in the body over time, and have been found in body tissue and breast milk. These chemicals can cause liver damage, birth defects and damage to the reproductive system even at low exposure levels.

Most toys made of soft plastics are likely to contain phthalates. If you don't know about a toy that is made of soft plastic, the general guideline is the stiffer it is, the fewer phthalates it is likely to have. Be more careful with a vinyl toy that is ripped or torn. The tear is more likely to be a spot where phthalates can easily pass into a child's body. Some top-selling toys likely to contain phthalates include rubber duckies, teethingers, and soft plastic books.

In addition to phthalates, toys containing toxic metals can also cause health problems. The bugs backpack by Terry Katz listed above for lead content also contains unsafe levels of arsenic and mercury. The Big Motorcycle Chopper/Cruiser Combo by Wheel World could expose children to bromine.

Last month the American Medical Association urged the Food and Drug Administration to require the labeling of all medical products containing phthalates as a means of protecting newborns in hospitals. While the Environmental Protection Agency has requested a comprehensive study on the effects of phthalates be conducted by the National Academies of Science—a process that could take several years. The European Union (EU) has already taken action on this issue. A permanent ban on the use of phthalates in children's toys was instituted by the EU in 2005. A similar, voluntary agreement that prevents the use of phthalates in children's products was implemented by the Canadian government in 1998.

This October, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a law instituting the first ban on the use of phthalates in toys and other children's products in the nation. Under this new law, any product containing more than 1/10th of one percent of phthalates can no longer be sold or distributed in the State of California beginning in 2009.

“There is currently no adequate system in place to regulate or restrict hazardous chemicals in toys, whether they are made in the U.S. or abroad. Policy changes are clearly needed to keep hazardous chemicals out of toys and other children's products,” said Mike Shriberg of the Ecology Center, an environmental non-profit organization based in Ann Arbor. “Since the federal government is not doing its job to keep hazardous chemicals out of products, it's time for Michigan's legislators to step up and take a leadership role, as Senator Clarke is doing today.”

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