Senator Seward Reports On...lead In Toys

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Get the lead out! That used to be a local expression used to urge someone not to poke along on the highway. It's a message we should start sending to toymakers and manufacturers and importers of consumer goods.

I was surprised by the number of Christmas toys and decorations this year that, along with being stamped "Made in China," included a holiday greeting advising me to wash my hands after hanging the lights because the electrical strand of twinkling lights contained lead. From tree lights to toys, lead is back in a big way. And that's not good. We thought we dealt with this back in the 1970s when we banned lead based paints.

New York as a state can not do anything about our trade policies or global markets that spawn and reward the production of cheap goods. But federal and state consumer organizations are carefully watching and monitoring products placed on toy shelves.

The news is not good. Nearly 5,000 children in New York are diagnosed annually with lead poisoning. Children exposed to lead can suffer damage to their brains and central nervous systems, resulting in hearing, behavioral and learning problems, among others. Diagnosis is often difficult, since children don't exhibit typical signs of sickness such as fevers.

Last year Target recalled children's gardening toys and chairs, and Family Dollar stores recalled Hallowe'en candy pails -- a half million items between them -- just for excessive lead levels in paint. Those are just two examples. Unfortunately, **many toys remained on store shelves** following nationwide recalls of lead contaminated toys and toys determined to be unsafe for other issues.

That's why I am joining in sponsorship of two bills in the senate that would help protect our children from lead poisoning and dangerous toys.

Senate bill 6350 creates a state childhood lead poisoning prevention and safe housing act. Its goal is to eliminate lead poisoning in children by getting landlords and homeowners to remove lead based paint and other products from residences and apartments. It also offers screening of at risk children and pregnante women, and would initiate a public awareness and education program as well as an inspection program of homes likely to contain lead paint.

Senate bill 6548 enacts a state toy recall protection and enforcement act. The bill makes it illegal to keep toys on the shelf or to sell them if they have been recalled; requires stores to post recall notices on their shelves; and provides for a STOP-SALE method so stores can prevent recall items from being sold. The measure would be enforced by the state attorney general, and it applies to any toys that have been recalled for any reason.

The issue isn't limited to lead toys alone. Toys "R" Us recalled over 128,000 "Elite Operations" toy sets because of high levels of lead in the paint, and because the toys have sharp points, which pose a laceration hazard. Mega Brands America, Inc. recalled more than 4 million Magnetix Magnetic building sets because of magnets coming loose and causing intestinal and other problems in children who ingest them.

Parents can contact their local health departments or public nursing office if they are concerned that their homes may have a high lead content, or want to discuss screening their children.

You can find out about recalls from the federal Consumer Safety Product Commission at **http://www.cpsc.gov** (government website) or **http://www.toyinfo.org** (note: this website is sponsored by the Toy Industry Association). Also you may want to look at **http://www.healthytoys.org** for additional information.

Vigilance and care are required in order to maintain a healthy home and safe environment for children.

Protecting our children is an important part of my job, and the legislation I am backing will help keep them safe.