

Feds urge signing up for e-mail toy alerts

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If you think the number of toy recalls has skyrocketed in the last year, it's not just your child-like imagination.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reported 40 toy recalls in fiscal year 2006 and 61 in fiscal year 2007. Already in the CPSC's fiscal year 2008, which began Oct. 1, 25 toy recalls have been issued, with more to come this month, said CPSC spokesman Scott Wolfson.

"The pace has picked up," he said. "What that translates into is a need for parents to find the most effective way to stay apprised of recalls."

Most consumers find out about recalls through the media, but the CPSC is hoping to sign up at least 1 million consumers for e-mail alerts, Wolfson said.

"You may hear about a product recall, but you may not know if that product is the one you have," he said. "By delivering straight to your inbox, you're able to go back and take in the

next level of detail and find out what to do next."

Once consumers are signed up for e-mail alerts, they can detail what type of products about which they want to receive information.

Although the CPSC has legal power to carry out mandatory recalls, Wolfson said most are done on a voluntary basis with the company in question. That's because mandatory recalls can take nearly a year to carry out, but it takes only a few days to do a voluntary recall, he said.

When a recall is announced, it's important for consumers to comply with the CPSC's recommended course of action. Too many consumers simply throw the defective product away, making it difficult for the CPSC to track how many recalled products are still in the public's hands, Wolfson said.

This year, the Aqua Dots recall is one of the most serious in terms of children's toys, according to Wolfson. Aqua Dots, a

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craft kit for creating designs with small colored beads that fuse together when sprayed with water, were found to contain GHB, or the date-rape drug. When ingested by children, the chemical caused some to become comatose or develop respiratory problems and seizures.

"That's not a recall that's going to be repeated many times over," he said. "It's a rarity in terms of occurrence, but it's one that is so severe that we're doing a very in-depth investigation to find out what went on."

Other prominent recalls this year include toys containing excessive levels of lead such as various Sesame Street and Dora the Explorer figures made by Fisher-Price and those containing loose magnets, like some Polly Pocket and Barbie and Tanner toys from Mattel.

"The magnet issue is one that's larger and more pervasive in terms of the number of recalls and the number of incidents we've tracked," Wolfson said.

Those wishing to receive CPSC e-mail alerts can register at www.cpsc.gov.

For consumers who lack a computer or Internet access, the CPSC publishes a quarterly newsletter on all recalled items that can be obtained by sending a postcard to Consumer Product Safety Commission, 4330 East West Highway, Room 519, Bethesda, MD 20814. ★