

## Connecticut Post (Bridgeport, CT)

August 24, 2007

**Section:** Opinion

**Article ID:** 6712519

### Democrats want action on China products

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From dog food to toothpaste to Sponge Bob, it seems everywhere you turn lately there is another bad product imported from China. Connecticut Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., wants a moratorium on imports of Chinese food, toys and pet food. And, Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-3, has called for quick federal action to insure products are safe.

In a letter to President Bush, Dodd strongly urges him "to take immediate steps to temporarily halt these imports from China."

Dodd said that the federal government's inspection system is "simply inadequate" and he recommended the president work with Congress to devise "a more robust and effective inspection mechanism."

Earlier this month, Mattel Inc., recalled more than 18 million Chinese-made toys that contain lead or include magnets that pose a choking hazard to small children. Since then, some 250,000 SpongeBob SquarePants books and journals, 70,000 spinning tops and pails with Thomas and Friends or Curious George handles, and 14,000 Toby & Me jewelry sets have been recalled because they may contain lead paint.

DeLauro said it is critical for Congress and the White House to "act with a sense of urgency" to identify tainted products before they reach the marketplace and to test children for lead exposure who may have played with these contaminated toys.

"Already this year 45 toy recalls have resulted in millions of toys being recalled because of contamination with lead paint," she said.

"With the holiday season approaching, and 80 percent of toys being made in China we cannot afford to simply wait for China to act. This administration needs to take immediate steps so that harmful products never reach our store shelves."

President Bush has formed an Import Safety Working Group to examine the problem. DeLauro, however, is concerned that the group has pushed back the release of their recommendations from September to mid-November.

The federal Consumer Product Safety Commissions says it is being vigilant.

"The recalls are a sign the CPSC continues to be on the look out and continues to have expectations that companies will report to us when there is a lead dander in the products they sell," said spokesman Scott Wolfson.

No injuries have been reported but ingesting lead is not considered safe - particularly for young children.

Lead is especially toxic to the developing bodies and brains of children under the age of seven. Even small amounts of lead can cause irreversible injuries, including learning disabilities, brain damage, neuropsychological deficits, hyperactive behavior, which may not appear until many years after the exposure, according to Jeffrey **Killino**, a Philadelphia attorney who filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court to force Mattel to set up a fund that concerned parents could access to have their children tested for lead poisoning.

"Recalling the toys is only a first step," **Killino** said. "Replacing them costs Mattel pennies. If Mattel is really concerned about the safety of children, then it should address the root of the issue - determining how many children were affected by these poisoned toys so that they can get immediate treatment. Only then can parents have true peace of mind."

The Chinese government has apparently figured out that exporting tainted products is bad for business in the long run.

Chinese Vice Premier Wu Yi said they have launched a four-month campaign to focus on the products that have shaken foreign consumer confidence in the "Made in China" label.

"This is a special battle to protect the health and personal interests of the public and to protect the reputation of Chinese goods and the national image," Wu said, according to an official Chinese government Web site.

Dodd said that American companies must also share some of the blame.

"It is clear that many U.S. businesses who choose to locate their manufacturing facilities outside of the United States have failed to guarantee the safety of their products," he said.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the nation's largest toy seller, has vowed to increase testing and oversight of the playthings it sells.

The retailer plans to increase third-party testing of toys and said it was in discussions with manufacturers and an industry trade group about a children's product seal of approval, which would certify that a product passed independent safety tests.

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