

# A EUROPEAN TOY SAFETY CAMPAIGN FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

by Brenda Azzopardi



The European Commission has just triggered off regulations in time for Christmas, after thousands of suspected toys - many of them Chinese-made products containing high amounts of lead, paint and choking hazards - were sold in European markets. During the last few months, various batches of toys were, for some reason or other, found to be unsuitable for children. Last August, the EU took action by ordering the withdrawal of millions of Chinese-made products from shops' shelves.

To increase the awareness of both parents and children of this problem, and on how this should be tackled to avoid potential danger, Commissioner for Consumer Protection Meglenda Kuneva, has come up with a new toy safety campaign, entitled 'Safety Holidays'. Consumer organisations around Europe are to assume responsibility for increasing awareness in their respective countries, at local level. According to the European Commission, the current EU regulatory framework; namely the General Product Safety Directive together with its RAPEX system, is fundamentally sound, but a double check at every stage of production and effective enforcement of the present legal framework would put it on a firmer basis.

A review of toy safety checks is also in its final stages, while a the issue of proposals for a directive on toy safety before Christmas is also in the pipeline, in response to the European Parliament's request

to improve the CE marking system. The CE mark shows that an item meets all the essential requirements set out by the relevant EU directives and that the applicable conformity assessment procedures have been followed. The current system depends more on the conduction of the safety tests carried out by manufacturers themselves, whereas according to the European Parliament, checks and certifications by independent inspectors will be more effective.

MEPs are now demanding that all toy products should clearly show the place of production. Since the endorsement of a proposed Directive by the EU-27 before the festive season is highly unlikely, some kind of measure is needed to step up action improving the marking system of toys during this campaign. Consistently, the Commissioner has underlined that there will be no more compromise where safety issues are concerned and where European values are at stake. Also, even though the Commission believes in open markets and fair competition, this will never be carried out at the expense of safety. As for trade with China, it is in the interest of both parties to maintain strong relations, as long as problems relating to product safety are solved.

The ultimate goal for the EU is to strike a compromise between business and consumers, where one would find companies guaranteeing safe goods; while parents, especially, are being warned about the hazards involved. The 'Safety Holidays' campaign is intended to provide direction on how to choose a child's Christmas present; defining, in the process, which goods are dangerous and what precautions should be taken to protect children. In the end, action at both EU and national level must go hand-in-hand to give consumers the high standards they deserve. ☺

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