

Toy Safety Study – non-compliance with EN-71

By Tim Yeomans PhD

The Pro-Safe Report released in 2010 makes for very interesting reading. It was a joint market surveillance action on toys, co-ordinated by the Product Safety Enforcement Forum of Europe. The aim of the action was to investigate the safety of toys on the market that have been tested and certified as being EN-71 compliant (Part 1 and 3). Conformance to EN-71 was judged on the basis of testing of small parts and magnets, as well as of trace heavy metals.

The study commenced in late 2008 and the report was published in mid-2010. Samples of toys were collected from toy manufacturers, importers and distributors. Of note is the way the sampling was prepared in that this was not a random sampling event. Samples were specifically chosen from those economic operators, as well as particular toys, that had the highest probability of finding non-compliances.

Approximately 14,000 toys were initially viewed by various inspectors; 580 of these were chosen for laboratory testing. Toys from China represented over 50% of those sent for testing, the remaining toys came from the EU (9%), Unknown (34%) and Other (4%). The fail rate for toys, in terms of EN-71 Part 1 and 3, from these areas were broadly similar:

- China – 44%
- EU – 38%
- Unknown – 58%
- Other – 50%.

The toy categories tested were: Puzzles, Dolls and accessories, Soft Toys, Bath Toys, Rattles, Soft Balls, Other Painted Toys and Other Toys. Soft Balls fared the best, with only 11% failing outright, while Puzzles fared the worst with 67% not being compliant (presumably due to the presence of small parts). Soft Toys were the next most non-compliant toy category with 46% failing the testing, mostly in the area of presence of trace heavy metal (chromium and lead).

There are many interesting interpretations to be made from this report. Although China is often identified as a country that produces proportionately high non-compliant product, we see that there is little difference between the rate of non-compliance between China and other parts of the world – within the confines of this study at any rate.



It is perhaps a little concerning that the rate of non-compliance is so high, albeit in a study designed to pick up non-conformances. That being said, it is evident that in the global manufacturing of today's world, oversight of compliance is essential and manufacturers, retailers, importers and distributors need to be aware of the implications of dealing with a product that is non-compliant with safety regulations. At best the toy is not fit for purpose, at worst it can result in serious injury or death.

Profile

Tim graduated from the Institute of Technology Carlow with a Degree in Industrial Biology, and completed his Ph.D. in Microbiology in UCC which focused on pathogenic fungi. Tim was subsequently employed as a post-doctoral scientist in the Microbiology Research Unit in the Dublin Dental School and Hospital investigating pathogenic yeast species. Tim then joined **airmid healthgroup Ltd.**



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