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W.A.T.C.H. REVEALS ITS 2020 NOMINEES FOR THE “10 WORST TOYS” THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

48th Annual Report Cautions Parents:
Beware of the Danger of Purchasing Potentially Harmful Toys

One Child Is Treated In U.S. Emergency Rooms Every Three Minutes For A Toy-Related Injury

Boston, Mass. (Nov. 23, 2020) **At a time when children are spending more time playing at home to curb the spread of Covid-19, toy safety remains a critical concern.** World Against Toys Causing Harm, Inc. (W.A.T.C.H.) today revealed its nominees for the “**10 Worst Toys of 2020**” and demonstrated why the “**Calico Critters Nursery Friends,**” “**Star Wars Mandalorian Darksaber,**” “**Missile Launcher,**” and other potentially hazardous toys should not be in the hands of children. Although intended for fun and entertainment, many toys contain hidden hazards unnecessarily putting children at risk of injury or death. At this year’s press conference at Franciscan Children’s in Boston, W.A.T.C.H. offered practical tips for identifying hazards, **so parents and caregivers know what traps to avoid when inspecting toys already in their homes and when buying toys—especially in the upcoming 2020 holiday shopping season.**

Consumer Advocates Joan Siff, President of W.A.T.C.H., and James Swartz, Director of W.A.T.C.H., illustrated some of the safety hazards recently identified on toy store shelves and online, including **toys with small parts or fiber-like hairs with the potential for choking or ingestion injuries, a particular concern for young children.** Highlighted at this year’s conference were **toys that encourage aggressive or violent play that could result in potential impact or laceration injuries and toys sold with unrealistic warnings and instructions.** Swartz and Siff also discussed the impact of online purchasing on toy safety, up-to-date information about toy recalls and the necessity for more stringent oversight of the toy industry. **One reason the message today is so urgent: Many toy-related injuries are preventable.**

With the recent surge of COVID-19 cases, families looking for ways to keep their children engaged while socially distancing at home are relying on manufacturers more heavily to make sure their children’s toys are designed with safety as the top priority. Unfortunately, there have been many deaths, disfigurements and disabilities inflicted upon children as a result of poorly designed and tested toys. **There is an average estimated 240,000 toy-related injuries to children each year¹.** For over four decades, W.A.T.C.H. has tackled the issue of dangerous toys in the hope of bringing about change and reducing injuries to children. Nonetheless, dangerous toys remain on store shelves, in catalogues, and on e-tailers’ websites. Shockingly, **classic toy dangers,** such as small parts, strings, projectiles, toxic substances, rigid materials, and inaccurate warnings and labels, **continue to reappear in new generations of toys putting children at risk.**

Steps for a Safer Holiday Season and Beyond:



W.A.T.C.H.'S 2020 Nominees for The “10 Worst Toys” List www.toysafety.org www.twitter.com/@WATCHsafety

The holidays may look different this year due to travel restrictions and social distancing protocols, but children are still excited to play with their favorite toys. During this time of change and uncertainty, when families and caregivers look to toys for their children’s entertainment and engagement, the toy industry experienced a 19% growth in the first three quarters of this yearⁱⁱ. **Although there is much that families may not be able to control during COVID-19, there are some steps they can take to have a safer holiday season when it comes to toy safety.**

- **Home Base: What’s in Your Toybox?** With limited after-school opportunities, children are spending more time playing with toys and games. Extra time playing with toys at home could result in a surge of toy-related injuries. **The increased usage of toys and games during the coronavirus pandemic, and families’ increased dependence on the safety of these products,** highlights the importance of the safety messages W.A.T.C.H. has been promoting for years. While informing families about the dangers of small parts and other traditional toy hazards, W.A.T.C.H. works year-round to reduce preventable injuries to children. W.A.T.C.H. is alerting parents to be vigilant when it comes to toy safety and regularly **examine the toys in their child’s toy box for hidden hazards** that may or not be easily detected, such as toys with small parts sold to babies. **Consumers may expect there are sufficient checks and balances in place to prevent dangerous toys from reaching store shelves and e-commerce sites, but unfortunately this is not always the case.** The reality is many of these unsafe toys end up in children’s homes and schools. Even toys that pass existing safety standards can be dangerous. Toys with small parts that could detach during play or long pieces that could be mouthed and occlude a child’s airway are examples of less obvious hazards. On the 2020 “Worst Toys” list, both the **My Sweet Love Lots To Love Babies Minis** and the **Calico Critters Nursery Friends** have parts that could be potential choking hazards for young children. Choking is one of the most significant contributors to toy-related injuries and deaths–this is unacceptable.
- **Reality Check: Toys that Promote Aggressive Play:** W.A.T.C.H. cautioned toy shoppers to beware that some **toys that encourage aggressive play or violence** could present a serious risk of head or other impact injuries. The **WWE Jumbo Superstar Fists**, one of this year’s nominees, is sold to enable 3 year old children to emulate pro wrestling “superstars”. No warnings or cautions are provided regarding the potential for blunt force or impact injuries. Another toy, **Star Wars Mandalorian Darksaber**, encourages children “SWING FOR BATTLE....!” and is made of rigid plastic, with the potential for facial and other impact injuries. Warnings and instructions are necessary and important, but this does not mean manufacturers can absolve themselves of responsibility by simply adding a label to a toy. A toy’s marketing and design may encourage contradictory uses. Some of these toys are being marketed without appropriate cautions or protective gear. **Others have instructions or warnings that are unrealistic to follow in real life.** Kids’ play is predictably unpredictable. As such parents and caregivers should carefully weigh the risk of injuries from toys that promote violent play. In some cases, families may decide these toys are inherently too dangerous to be used by children in the first place.
- **Shopping Online with Safety In Mind:** Shoppers looking to limit store visits and avoid holiday crowds **during the pandemic are buying more products online, and toys are no exception.** E-commerce sales are expected to see an unprecedented boom this holiday season with a \$198.73 billion in salesⁱⁱⁱ. In October, online toy sales spiked 85% from the same time last year^{iv}. While online sales continue to skyrocket, shoppers need to know the **unique safety considerations involved with online purchases.** Ordering online, shoppers face the disadvantage of not being able to physically examine the toy at the time of purchase. Some online product descriptions may omit warnings and cautions or provide incomplete or misleading information. Furthermore, unsafe or recalled toys may resurface on second-hand online sites. **W.A.T.C.H. wants to remind the many families relying on online shopping during**

this time to thoroughly inspect a toy and its packaging for warning signs of obvious hazards before giving it to a child.

- ***Shop Defensively:*** In this new world where so much has changed, parents and caregivers still need to remain vigilant when it comes to toy safety. Unfortunately, even toys that are in compliance with current industry or regulatory standards have proven to be hazardous, further demonstrating the inadequacy of existing standards. So, what can parents do to arm themselves against toys that could injure children? Since there currently is no full-proof safety net in place to prevent dangerous toys from reaching consumers, the message for parents this holiday season is to think *defensively* when it comes to toy safety. For starters, parents can avoid many toy-related hazards by remaining cautious, identifying safety red flags, knowing what classic safety traps to look out for, inspecting new and old toys for defects and poor design, and learning to identify hidden hazards (go to **ToySafety.org** for more info.). W.A.T.C.H. cautions toy shoppers not to be lulled into a false sense of security that a toy is safe because it has a familiar brand name on the package or it is available from a well-known retailer or e-tailer.

Year-In-Review:

- ***Toy-related Injuries & Deaths:*** According to the latest statistics from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), there were an estimated 226,100 toy-related injuries in the U.S. in 2018, and a reported 43 children died from toy-related incidents from 2016 to 2018^v. One child is treated in a U.S. emergency room every three minutes for a toy-related injury^{vi}. Behind each injury and fatality is a child and family whose lives are often permanently affected. Even one injury to one child is too many, particularly when the injury is preventable.
- ***Toy Recalls:*** The recurrence of many known hazards in toys recalled is suggestive of a broken system that needs fixing before more children are harmed. **In a year when toys available for sale were recalled for a wide range of defects, such as a musical llama with screws that could choke a young child, plush animals with lead that is a known toxin, and lawn darts that could puncture a child's skull^{vii}, there is clearly more to be done to protect children.** Many of the toys recalled contain types of hazards, such as choking and puncture risks, that have been well-known to the toy industry for years. In the twelve-months since W.A.T.C.H.'s last Toy Conference, the CPSC announced **10 toy recalls representing more than 833,745 units of toys in the U.S. that could lead to serious injuries or death^{viii}**. While recalls are important safety measures, they are reactive not proactive. Recent CPSC toy recalls highlight the importance of making sure products are safe **BEFORE** reaching retail outlets. At the time of a recall, a toy may already be in the hands of unsuspecting children who are put at risk of suffering serious, even life-threatening injuries. Once these toys are on the market, they can reappear for resale online, in a child's toy box, or even at a yard sale. Many consumers never receive notice of toy recalls. Immediate action is needed when the risk of child injury or death is known, so that more children are not unnecessarily put in harm's way. Further, it's important when choosing toys to remember **not all unsafe toys are necessarily recalled**; enforcement agencies, such as the CPSC, may have limited resources to police such a large industry, existing standards can be inadequate, and regulators often scramble to keep up with emerging technologies.

First Line of Defense– Safe Design and Manufacture: Many toy-related injuries and deaths could have been prevented with better designed, manufactured and marketed toys. In a toy industry generating approximately \$90 billion dollars in global sales annually^{ix}, safety concerns must be a priority, not an afterthought. The difficulty in purging the market of goods that have been recalled shows **the burden must be on manufacturers and retailers, not consumers, to identify the known hazards before their products enter the channels of commerce.** Many of the toys recalled in the last year not only put children at risk of serious injury or death, but are also evidence of

substandard manufacturing practices and inadequate pre-market testing. The best weapon in the fight to prevent injuries to children continues to be preventing unsafe toys from reaching consumers in the first place.

Stricter Government Enforcement: The CPSC needs more tools to oversee a \$28 billion U.S. toy industry and the manufacture of safe products for children. These tools include increased funding, an expanded workforce, more product testing, stricter safety requirements, broader and better-publicized notification of recalls and hefty fines imposed on manufacturers whose toys are recalled or found to be defective.

Spread the Word: **Social-distancing does not mean families are on their own when it comes to toy safety.**

W.A.T.C.H.'s **#SHOUTsafety** campaign is a **call to action** emphasizing the importance of sharing safety information to help reduce preventable injuries. Armed with information about what types of defects have been associated with injuries in the past, more consumers can make informed decisions when choosing children's products. Thanks in part to the efforts of W.A.T.C.H., toy safety has become an active conversation that has led to significant changes in the industry and increased regulations. **While a step in the right direction, regulations should be a floor, not a ceiling, for toy safety.** As a result of advocacy, the industry and regulators continue to be held accountable to make safety a priority and millions of toys have been re-designed, recalled, or otherwise identified to consumers. There is more work to be done to prevent needless and tragic injuries to children as a result of poorly designed and manufactured toys. A key message today is to let consumers know that while there are dangerous toys being sold in retail stores and online, advocacy and awareness this holiday season and year-round can truly save lives.

W.A.T.C.H.'S 2020 "10 WORST TOYS" LIST: Consumers can help children enjoy a safer holiday season knowing what traps to avoid when selecting toys. W.A.T.C.H.'s "10 Worst Toys" list, a hands-on tool for consumers, raises awareness of the different types of potential hazards to avoid while toy shopping. **The particular toys nominated for the "10 Worst Toys" list are illustrative of some potential hazards in toys being sold to consumers and should not be considered as the only potentially hazardous toys on the market:**

CALICO CRITTERS NURSERY FRIENDS

Price: \$14.95
Manufacturer or Distributor: Epoch Co., LTD.
Retailer(s): Walmart, Walmart.com, Amazon.com, Kohl's, Kohls.com
Age Recommendation: "3+"
Warnings: "WARNING: CHOKING HAZARD-Small parts. Not for children under 3 years" (packaging)

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR CHOKING INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! This set of cute "critters" is labeled for ages "3+" on the throw-away packaging, however "flocked animals", regardless of labels, are appealing to oral-age children, as recognized by the industry small parts regulation. The Calico Critters collection includes small parts, such as a pacifier, with the potential for choking injuries.

MISSILE LAUNCHER

Price: \$9.99
Manufacturer or Distributor: Toysmith, Toysmith.com, Redballoontoystore.com
Retailer(s): Home Goods
Age Recommendation: “5+”
Warnings: “Outdoor use only. Do not aim at people or animals”;
“WARNING: CHOKING HAZARD—Small parts....”
(packaging)

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR EYE AND FACIAL INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! 5 year old children are advised to “GO! Launch” this “missile” with the provided slingshot-like launcher, and “watch it soar...up to 75 ft!” The warnings and cautions make no mention of potential for eye or facial injuries. Moreover, the act of initiating launch occurs near a child’s face, as depicted on the packaging.

MARVEL AVENGERS VIBRANIUM POWER FX CLAW

Price: \$14.99
Manufacturer or Distributor: Hasbro
Retailer(s): Kmart, Amazon.com, Walmart, Walmart.com
Age Recommendation: “Ages 5+”
Warnings: “CAUTION: Do not hit or swing at people or animals”, and other cautions on package insert

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR EYE AND FACIAL INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! These rigid, plastic “power FX” claws, “inspired” by the famous comic book character, Black Panther, are sold for 5 year olds. The manufacturer includes a caution prohibiting “hit[ting] or swing[ing] at people or animals”.

GLORIA OWL

Price: \$16.99
Manufacturer or Distributor: Jellycat Ltd.
Retailer(s): Home Goods, Amazon.com, The Paper Source, papersource.com, Saks Fifth Avenue, saksfifthave.com
Age Recommendation: “Recommended for 12 months +”
Warnings: “WARNING! Not recommended for children under 12 months due to coarse fabric/fibre shredding” (and other warnings on throw-away tag)

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR INGESTION/ASPIRATION INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! This cuddly, plush owl is sold for babies as young as 12 months old. Nevertheless, even the manufacturer recognizes the toy’s long, fiber-like hair may not be adequately rooted, and is prone to “shredding”. The hair, once separated, presents the potential for ingestion or aspiration injuries.

WWE JUMBO SUPERSTAR FISTS

Price: \$3.99
Manufacturer or Distributor: Jakks Pacific, Inc.
Retailer(s): Kmart, Amazon.com
Age Recommendation: “Ages 3+”
Warnings: “CAUTION: Adult supervision suggested. This is a toy. Simulated gloves are not to be used as a protective device” (packaging)

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR BLUNT FORCE AND IMPACT INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! These “jumbo” size fists are sold to enable 3 year old children to emulate pro wrestling “superstars”. No warnings or cautions are provided regarding the potential for blunt force or impact injuries.

SCIENTIFIC EXPLORER SCI-FI SLIME

Price: \$19.99
Manufacturer or Distributor: Alex Brands-Scientific Explorer
Retailer(s): Amazon.com, Kohl’s, Kohls.com, Toyexpresskids.com, Magic Beans
Age Recommendation: “10+”
Warnings: “WARNING: This set contains chemicals that may be harmful if misused. Read contents on individual container carefully. Not to be used by children except under adult supervision”, and other cautions/warnings

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR CHEMICAL-RELATED INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! This “supreme slime lab” is marketed for children to create “GLOBS of gross gloppy goop!”, further identified as “magnetic”, “atomic”, and other types of “slimes”. There are numerous warnings and cautions on the box, package inserts, and the included chemicals and ingredients. For example, the zinc sulfide pouch warns that its contents “[m]ay cause eye, skin, and respiratory irritation. Harmful if swallowed....”

THE ORIGINAL BOOMERANG INTERACTIVE STUNT UFO

Price: \$14.99
Manufacturer or Distributor: Amax Group
Retailer(s): Target, Target.com, Walmart.com
Age Recommendation: “Ages 8+”
Warnings: “**BOOMERANG UFO WARNING:** “....The boomerang UFO can cause damage to the user, spectators and animals....”; “**WARNING!** Keep hands, hair, and loose clothing away from the propeller....”, and other cautions/warnings on package and package insert

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR CUTTING AND PROPELLER-RELATED INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! Children are encouraged to “**PERFORM AMAZING STUNTS & TRICKS!**” by “tossing” it into the air. Despite warning about potential propeller “damage”, the manufacturer urges users to play “catch” by “pass[ing] the UFO back and forth to friends....”

BOOM CITY RACERS STARTER PACK

Price: \$14.89
Manufacturer or Distributor: Moose Toys LLC
Retailer(s): Target, Target.com, Amazon.com, Walmart.com
Age Recommendation: “For Ages 4+”
Warnings: **“WARNING: DO NOT PLAY SOUNDS CLOSE TO YOUR EAR! DO NOT AIM AT EYES OR FACE! CAUTION: DO NOT LAUNCH VEHICLE AT PEOPLE OR ANIMALS!”** and other warnings/cautions on packaging and packaging insert

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR EYE AND FACE INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! The “BOOM CITY” race cars are sold with a ripcord “launcher” so children as young as 4 years old can use the “stunt set” to “RIP, RACE, [and] EXPLODE!” these miniature vehicles. The manufacturer provides numerous warnings and cautions, including not to aim at “eyes or face.”

MY SWEET LOVE LOTS TO LOVE BABIES MINIS

Price: \$6.97
Manufacturer or Distributor: JC Toys Group, Inc; Walmart Inc
Retailer(s): Walmart, Walmart.com
Age Recommendation: “2+”
Warnings: None

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR INGESTION AND CHOKING INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! This “mini” baby comes with a feeding set, sold for 2 year olds as “[a]ccessories for doll use only”. The slender, rigid plastic spoon is approximately 2¾” long with the potential to be mouthed and occlude a child’s airway.

STAR WARS MANDALORIAN DARKSABER

Price: \$29.99
Manufacturer or Distributor: Hasbro; Disney
Retailer(s): Target, Target.com, Amazon.com, Walmart, Walmart.com, Bestbuy.com
Age Recommendation: “4+”
Warnings: “CAUTION: Do not swing, poke or jab at people or animals”, and other cautions/warnings on packaging and package inserts

HAZARD: POTENTIAL FOR BLUNT FORCE AND EYE INJURIES!

W.A.T.C.H. OUT! Young children are encouraged to “SWING FOR BATTLE....!” with this “ancient, black bladed lightsaber” made of rigid plastic, with the potential for facial and other impact injuries.

W.A.T.C.H., Inc. is a non-profit organization working to educate the public about child safety. W.A.T.C.H. helps raise awareness about the dangers hidden in many toys, children’s products, and recreational activities. Noted trial attorneys, authors and consumer advocates, Edward Swartz (1934-2010), James Swartz, Joan Siff and W.A.T.C.H. have been responsible for the “**10 WORST TOYS**” **nominees** released for over 48 years as well as a **Summer Safety Report** addressing summer hazards for children. For more information on W.A.T.C.H. and the press conference, please visit www.toysafety.org or follow us @WATCHsafety on Twitter and Facebook.

Joan E. Siff, President of W.A.T.C.H. & Board Member, Franciscan Children’s.

James A. Swartz, Director of W.A.T.C.H., noted trial attorney, author and consumer advocate.

i [Estimates for Different Age Groups 2010–2018 \(CPSC 2020 Report Toy Related Deaths and Injuries for 2018\)](#)

ii www.npd.com

iii www.digitalcommerce360.com/article/online-holiday-sales

iv www.digitalcommerce360.com/article/which-retailer-will-grab-online-toys-sales-this-holiday-season

v www.cpsc.gov/ 2020 Report Toy Related Deaths and Injuries for 2018

vi www.nationwidechildrens.org

vii www.cpsc.gov (Lili Llama Recall), www.cpsc.gov (Aflak Duck Recall), www.cpsc.gov (Lawn Dart Recall)

viii <https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls>

ix <https://www.statista.com/topics/1108/toy-industry/>