

## W.A.T.C.H.'s Annual 2023 Summer Safety Report

### W.A.T.C.H. ANNOUNCES ITS 2023 SUMMER SAFETY TIPS: WHAT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS NEED TO KNOW TO KEEP KIDS SAFE WARM WEATHER HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL PRODUCTS

ON W.A.T.C.H.'S LIST OF 10 POTENTIAL SUMMER SAFETY CONCERNS FOR KIDS:  
WATER BALLOONS CATAPULTED BY SLINGSHOT LAUNCHERS, STRAPS THAT CAN BECOME  
ENTANGLED ON PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT, BACKYARD KIDDIE POOLS WITH RAINWATER,  
FIREWORKS IN THE HANDS OF CHILDREN, HOVERBOARDS WITH LITHIUM BATTERIES  
THAT CAN OVERHEAT AND BURST INTO FLAMES, AND MORE

**Boston, MA (JUNE 14, 2023)** With children's injuries typically doubling over the summer months,<sup>i</sup> **World Against Toys Causing Harm, Inc. (W.A.T.C.H.)** releases its **2023 Summer Safety Report**, including "10 Summer Safety Tips," and shares important information to help parents and caregivers navigate the summer safely. **Today's urgent and timely message: staying informed and sharing safety information with family, friends, and caregivers could help save a child's life this summer.**

**The official start of summer is one week away, and during a time when children have more time to play and enjoy the outdoors, there will be a significant increase in injuries. W.A.T.C.H.'s Summer Safety Report provides practical information so families can have a safer summer.** Many hazards, whether year-round or warm-weather-related, are linked with serious injuries to children each year. Reducing preventable injuries is critical. **This report spotlights some safety traps to raise awareness about products with hazards that are lesser known, that have been associated with recent injuries, or that have the potential to cause injuries in the future.**

Consumer Advocates Joan E. Siff, President of W.A.T.C.H., and James A. Swartz, Director of W.A.T.C.H., showcase "10 Summer Safety Traps" as representative of some of the many different types of hazards families can avoid to safeguard children during the summer when kids will be spending more hours swimming, riding, and playing backyard games. Most preventable injuries take place near homes and communities, including an estimated 78% (175,500) of injury-related deaths in 2021. <sup>ii</sup> Swartz cautions, "One concern is that a surge in certain popular activities will translate into a surge in injuries in those categories, so it remains critical to know how to identify potential safety traps." **Swartz and Siff addressed potential summer hazards as well as recent recalls of children's recreational products and the implications on children's safety. The 2023 list of "10 Summer Safety Traps" representing some potential summer hazards includes:**

- **Hoverboards:** Potential for burn, head, and other impact injuries
- **Inflatable Bounce Houses & Backyard Trampolines:** Potential for broken bones, head injuries, paralysis, death
- **Calico Critters Animal Figures & Sets:** Potential for choking, death
- **Non-motorized & Motorized Scooters:** Potential for fall and impact injuries
- **Projectile Toys:** Potential for eye and choking injuries
- **Helmet Straps & Recalled Swings:** Potential for strangulation, impact injury and bodily harm
- **Baby Pools & Pool Covers:** Potential for Drowning
- **ATV Hazards:** Risk of serious injury or death
- **Fireworks/Sparklers:** Potential for serious eye and hand injuries, burns, death
- **Recalled or Damaged Bicycle Helmets:** Potential for head and impact injuries

#### Layers of Concern: Inherent Risks, Defects, and Recalls

**W.A.T.C.H. alerts families and caregivers to remain vigilant and beware that some products and recreational activities may present multiple safety concerns but only some of which may be the subject of a recall.** For instance, while ATV's have been recalled for defects including faulty fuel pumps, pedals, and shock absorbers, the inherent dangers of collisions, overturns and occupant ejections associated with off-road riding expose consumers to further possibility of injury. **This summer, know the risks associated with products and activities, check for recalls, and be familiar with the type of defects that have been associated with injuries in the past.** Other potential hazards from W.A.T.C.H.'s "10 Summer Traps" include:

- **Hoverboards:** Some hoverboards have been recalled because of burn hazards adding another layer of concern for an activity that has the potential for head and other impact injuries from falls. W.A.T.C.H. first cautioned consumers in 2015 about fires connected to hoverboards with lithium batteries. Although marketed as an entertaining way to enjoy time outside, hoverboards (aka self-balancing scooters) continue to be associated with burn injuries and deaths. **The lithium-ion battery packs in hoverboards can overheat, posing a fire hazard and putting consumers at serious risk.** In March 2023, a hoverboard was recalled. At the time of the recall, two sisters had already tragically died in a fire that originated with the hoverboard.<sup>iii</sup> This recall involved 53,000 units of defective products that may already be in homes putting children at risk of injury. Consumers have a right to expect that the products their children use have been adequately tested and manufactured to guard against fire hazards. There were an estimated 121,300 ED hoverboard-related visits from 2017 through 2021.<sup>iv</sup> Recent deaths and fires associated with hoverboards emphasize the urgent need for change when it comes to protecting children from unsafe products.
- **Bicycle Helmets:** While many families are aware of the importance of bicycle helmets to keep kids safe, they might not be aware that there have been numerous bicycle helmet recalls over the years. Wearing bike helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by 60% and brain injury by 58%.<sup>v</sup> W.A.T.C.H. is alerting families to the importance of making sure a child's helmet has not been recalled and that it is not damaged.
- **Bounce Houses:** In addition to the potential risk of impact injuries from jumping inside a bounce house or from falling if a gust of wind sweeps the bounce house into the air, a recent recall of a bounce house with a hoop highlights the concerns of entrapment and strangulation.<sup>vi</sup> A four-year-old boy died of strangulation when the hoop from "My Bouncer Little Castle" became entangled around his throat and constricted his airway.<sup>vii</sup> Injuries from defectively designed, manufactured, or marketed products can be permanent and devastating for both children and their families.
- **Toys - Calico Critters:** Schools are out for the summer and kids have more time to play; families are depending on toys and other recreational products marketed for children to be safe. Despite W.A.T.C.H.'s sustained efforts over the years, unsafe toys continue to put children in danger. In its 2020 nominees for the "10 Worst Toys List", W.A.T.C.H. highlighted the potential safety risks associated with Calico Critters Nursery Friends with parts, such as a pacifier, that could be potential choking hazards for young children. In March of this year, a recall was announced for over 3.2 million Calico Critters Animal Figures and Sets because the bottle and pacifier accessories pose a choking hazard to children. The recall noted that the importer, Epoch Everlasting Play LLC, was aware of two deaths (a 2-year-old in 2018 and a 9-month-old in 2015) relating to oral-age children who died in incidents involving the pacifier accessory.<sup>viii</sup> There have been numerous other recalls addressing the issue of toys with parts that can detach, posing a choking hazard to young children. These hidden hazards, difficult for parents to identify at the time of purchase, must be prevented with better design and pre-market testing before they reach toy store shelves.
- **Playground Equipment:** When enjoying time at the playground or at a neighbor's swing set with children this summer, W.A.T.C.H. cautions families and caregivers to beware of safety traps that have been associated with past injuries (such as hot surfaces, sharp edges, and fall hazards) as well as recalled playground equipment which can increase the risk of harm. In March, over 43,000 2-in-1 Outdoor Kids Swings were recalled because the straps could break posing a fall hazard to children.<sup>ix</sup>
- **Scooters:** As the weather gets warmer, scooters are dusted off for outdoor play. Families may be lulled into a false sense of security that a toy or recreational product is safe because it is popular or marketed to children – unfortunately, this is not always the case. Scooters continue to lead the pack as both a popular way to stay active outdoors and as the leading cause of toy-related injuries to children. In 2021, an estimated 37,100 children under 15 years old were treated in emergency rooms for injuries associated with non-motorized scooters.<sup>x</sup> In addition to the inherent risk of falls that may accompany riding a scooter, scooters have been recalled for defects. This past June, a children's scooter was recalled because a wheel could loosen or fall off posing a fall hazard to children.<sup>xi</sup>

## **Recalls**

Informing families about the dangers of certain recreational activities and toy hazards is one of the many ways W.A.T.C.H. works year-round to reduce preventable injuries to children. W.A.T.C.H. encourages safer manufacture, design, and marketing of products before they enter the channels of commerce and promotes increased transparency and reporting by manufacturers when safety issues arise. Nonetheless, Siff and Swartz noted every year there are often millions of units of toys and other children's products recalled for hazards such as choking, strangulation, burns, blunt force trauma, and poisoning, after they have been available for sale. Recalls are important safety measures, but often occur only after the product is in the hands of unsuspecting children who may suffer serious, even life-threatening injuries. The difficulty in purging the market of goods that have been recalled shows that, while recalls are necessary, they are not a cure-all. Although intended for fun and entertainment, many toys and recreational products contain hidden hazards unnecessarily putting children at risk of injury or death. Swartz cautioned, "Unfortunately, we see

recalls with potential hazards that should be well known by the industry and prevented by more stringent pre-market testing and design practices.” Swartz and Siff addressed recent recalls of children’s recreational products and toys and the implications on children’s safety. W.A.T.C.H. advises parents in addition to being familiar with the types of hazards to avoid, to remember to regularly check for recalls and examine toys and other products played with by children.

### Water Safety

W.A.T.C.H.’s “10 Summer Traps” alerts parents and caregivers to other potential hazards, including shallow water traps in backyards for young children. Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths to children ages 1 to 4.<sup>xii</sup> Most fatal drownings take place at **homes during the summer.**<sup>xiii</sup> Beware of some of the lesser-known backyard water safety traps to help keep kids safe. Baby pools are portable and convenient to assemble but beware of hazards associated with water left in portable pools for young children. Although baby pools are shallower than standard pools, W.A.T.C.H. reminds **families that young children can drown in as little as two inches of water. A few shallow water safety traps include** baby pools and other water games left filled with water without barriers to prevent access, **gaps in pool covers**, or sagging pool covers that can collect water and may put children at risk of drowning. Drownings are often silent, and it takes just moments for an accident to happen. Siff said, **“One of our goals today is to be proactive and raise awareness about water safety, including those hazards that may not be widely known such as backyard shallow water.** Checking water safety measures at home is an important way to kick off the summer.”

### Raising Awareness

Although intended for fun and entertainment, many toys and recreational products contain hidden hazards unnecessarily putting children at risk of injury or death. Continued injuries to and deaths of children from popular warm weather activities and toys reveal the urgent need for increased awareness, safer products, better pre-market testing, and a more responsible market to help prevent injuries. In the meantime, **Siff advised, “Parents can avoid many hazards at home relating to popular toys and recreational activities by remaining vigilant, knowing the facts, and identifying safety red flags.”**

**W.A.T.C.H. emphasizes the importance of sharing information and raising awareness about products with a track record of injuries and deaths to save lives and reduce preventable injuries.** The 2023 Summer Safety report, part of W.A.T.C.H.’S 2023 #ShoutSafety campaign, encourages families and caregivers to **proactively spread the word about safety so that avoiding potential hazards is top of mind for families and caregivers as children enjoy the summer.** Increased dissemination of timely and detailed information about safety issues allows more consumers to make informed decisions when choosing children’s products and activities. Some safety traps the 2023 Summer Report addresses are the potential hazards associated with **motorized and non-motorized scooters, bounce houses that can fly away, and bicycle helmet straps that can become entrapped on playground equipment leading to strangulation.** While parents and caregivers must guard against many other warm weather hazards so kids can avoid injuries and have fun, W.A.T.C.H. highlights ten potential hazards **to begin the summer safety conversation with families.** The **practical and concrete information provided in W.A.T.C.H.’s 2023 Summer Safety Report can increase awareness and help keep your kids safe.**

(See Attached **“10 Summer Safety Traps”** For More Information)