

Angliska verzija

## **The situation with toys in Macedonia**

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## **Abbreviations:**

**RAPEX** - EU rapid alert system for all dangerous consumer products, with the exception of food, pharmaceutical and medical devices

**EN71** - [European standard](#) **EN 71** specifies [safety](#) requirements for [toys](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Compliance with the standard is legally required for all toys sold in the [European Union](#)

**CE** - Conformité Européenne (*European health & safety product label*)

**DINP** - Diisononyl Phthalate

**DEHP** - Diethylhexylphthalate

**EU- European Union**

## Introduction

We live under the presumption that toys are safe for our children. However, as the recent massive recalls have shown us, this is not so. For example, toys we buy in Macedonia, the Balkan region, and in the EU can contain lead and a number of other highly toxic chemicals or allergens. The inspection of imported toys, which make up about 90% of the market, is very random, and to this date no common international or regional labelling exists that allows parents to buy toys responsibly.

Macedonia has a “consumer law”. The law is quite general and enforcement is not ensured. There seem to be no sub-regulations limiting hazardous chemicals in consumer products, comparable to for example the EU toy safety or cosmetics directives. According to the “consumer law” all consumer products that come into Macedonia can be subject to testing, but many products enter the country uncontrolled and many are sold on street markets. The inspectorate for health protection has done some sample testing and found imported toys from Asia which contained cadmium.

Certain types of chemicals can build up to dangerous levels in humans causing adverse reproductive, developmental, immunological, hormonal and carcinogenic effects. With respect to reproductive health, exposure to these chemicals can lead to miscarriages, low birth weight babies and premature births. Women who have accumulated these kinds of chemicals in their lipids or body fat can pass as much as one third of their toxic burden to their infant children, both prenatal and after birth through breastfeeding. Sound management of chemicals can lower a woman's risk of contamination and improve maternal health, therefore improving the health of future generations.

In Macedonia, general health statistics are based on regular collecting of mortality and morbidity data as well as data for hospital services, utilization and resources. Unfortunately, the data from regular health statistics are not suitable for use in identification of chemical related diseases and conditions. The baseline level of chemicals in the human body is most important for identification of chemical exposure. The Republic of Macedonia does not have a regular bio monitoring programme for identification of baseline chemical contamination. The lack of a list of bio-exposure limits and bio monitoring program for assessment of most relevant

biological indicators do not allow a framework for appropriate health impact assessment. Finally, there is no comprehensive approach to identifying multiple exposures to different media and for more than one chemical.

The Ministries of Economy, Health Care, Labour, and Social Policy have responsibility for the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals. In addition, the Agency for Labour Medicine and the Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management; and Urban Planning, Construction and Environment play a role in this issue area. Inter-ministerial cooperation on product and chemical safety is however limited. The European Union regulations in the environment and public health area are among the top priorities – there is on going process of harmonization.

Macedonian NGO – Journalists for children and women rights and environmental protection as partner in the EuropeAid project “Product and Chemical safety in the Balkans”, leading by Women from Europe for Common Future, made a small research about the situation with the toys market in the country. In this Inventory of toys you can find some information which was available for us. Unfortunately, more of the information is closed, yet.

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## **Toys through the History, The magical figures to video games**

The development of today's term about the toys originated in the mid-16th century and one of the first designers considered René Descartes, who created a mechanical figure of a young girl, to show his own understanding of humans as perfect machines.

Any subsequent research on the development of toys quickly shows that the toys are rarely mentioned in historical reviews and in comparative studies of different cultures. That does not mean that there weren't things for playing. English sociologist Braille Sutton Smith argues that long-ago, in tribal societies, for the girls there were made dolls, and for boys bow and arrow. Children played with mud, twigs and stones and from that wore making copies on the house. Original understanding of the game is evident even today: in addition to the precious action heroes and video games, many young children still play in the sand and mud.

What sociologist says is that the early usage of toys is explained by the social character - it's part of education which is implemented by the adults and a way that children's communicate. The game, which prevailed in history, was played with other children, not playing with toys. Even today's children prefer to play with other children on their age, they are often forced to play alone with their toys. Richer their parents are, the children are staying home and playing with expensive toys, to keep them safe, rather than hang on unsafe streets. Also, today's kids are the only child in the family, or the difference in years between them is few years because of the different way of family planning, and even the way the game is quite different in relation to children from the time of the creation of civilization.

## **Pedagogy of John Locke**

What we know about the toys from that period is usually related to age and religious rituals, although there is some evidence that in some occasions there were used an additional sacred items and given to children to play with them. For

example, a small faded wooden figure that was representing the old man - Lord of the South American tribe Kadaveo Indian, children could use as a toy. Dragon or masks were also part of religious ceremonies, and children sometimes used as toys. Invention of the things that would be used exclusively for playing for the children was not fashionable, i.e. toys are not felt as an essential part of growth and education in the social community.

Even gradually in 17th and completely in the 18th century, a teacher beginning to recognize the children's game and toys as a suitable tool for education. Until then the toy is an expression, used to denote product without higher value-it was not so connected for Children, as much for cheap items and sundries. The modern word toy has retained something of the traditional sound of invalidity. Englishman John Locke is usually attributed to the idea that toys are not ordinary things and that to the children should be given to have fun and be educated. Its Locke popularization of cubes with letters, those became known as Locke cubes and were used for literacy. Locke work with toys was driven by the idea of children being removed from the street because they believed it was a place of rudeness and of vices.

Although there is evidence that moving machines were used as circus entertainment attraction for the elite nation since 1400 year, even from the 18th century begins production of the first toys. They were things that entertained children and the older like: the moving ducks that doorknob, dogs barking, other figures playing various musical instruments, small birds singing and jumped out of the box, small dwarf in which rural workers are moving, dolls calling their mother...

In the late 18th century is recognized far more serious approach of making educational toys and games, as were maps for learning geography, history and astronomy. Particular puzzles were invented in 1760 in order to facilitate the learning of the basic assembly. Manufacturers of this type of toys are advertised with the slogan "Connect the useful with fun. In the next century is conceived the development of international market of toys, whose manufacturers were located in England and Germany. According to John Bruer, a historian at Yale, "Suppliers such toys were selling much more than entertaining one. They sell social morality which emphasized the value, honesty and individual effort.

In the early 20th century, especially the second half is characterized with technological acceleration which will also be reflected of the toys and they will make a special industry. Consumer society, the cult of Christmas toys and Santa Claus in combination with modern technical achievements, whose product is a typical video games and computers, bring the toys in place which Decart, Locke and Frebel could not even dream of.

## **Toys in Macedonia**

The situation in Macedonia is not different. The former toys are replaced with video games where there is only violence, and on market for toys, shops and stalls are further filled with toys which may seriously endanger life and health of children and are mainly produced in China. According to information obtained by the research team of “Journalists for children and women rights and environmental protection”, Macedonia is one of few countries in the region in which there is no production of toys. Namely, the results from our study show that in Macedonia there are 10 companies registered to import toys and dealing with that activity. Of these, 7 companies imported 50 brands of toys that meet European safety standards for toys, while the other three companies are registered for toys imported products with suspicious composition, i.e. toys that are mostly with unclear origin.

However, according to analysts, the problem on the toys market is not with those importers whose toys pass legal duties, and demonstrated safety certificate issued by the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate who are distributed to the shop. The problem is with those toys that come illegally in the Macedonian market and represent 70 percent of the Macedonian market toys. Evidence of this is the large number of toys that are on the market which are on the list of prohibited products to the EU, known as RAPEX,

([http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/rapex/rapex\\_archives\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/rapex/rapex_archives_en.cfm)). Namely, EU RAPEX list is the one that contains products that do not meet the standards prescribed in the EU and are forbidden for distribution, which list once a week is supplemented by new products which composition proved harmful chemicals that are dangerous for children health. The team of researchers that work on this project found around 20 toys from RAPEX list in the stores in Macedonia. (Some of these toys are listed on the end of this book)

In the shops are freely sold toys manufactured in the Far East, and which may seriously endanger life and health of children. Here are included a plastic musical swings, bath- ducks and carpet puzzles. Just as an illustration, the European Commission RAPEX list placed the swing as dangerous one, otherwise produced in Hungary, despite stating that the product is dangerous because there is serious risk of suffocation because the child's head can easily become stuck. Besides the image of three rubber ducks for bathing, produced in China, there is a for the mentioned toys that contains phthalate softener, which for years is already dropped from use because they damage the liver, kidneys, and in the organism can act as a female hormone estrogen that is harmful to the human development and acting on the reproductive system. On the list there were found the favourite baby toys, the carpet puzzles where babies are lying during the game and often put them in the mouth. Besides their picture stands warning from the EU which says that this puzzles contain dangerous and irritating substances that can act on skin and central nervous system.

These are just a fraction of the examples that toys which are subject under the Directives for toys and relevant European standard EN 71, here are freely sold. One reason is the non-harmonized legislation, namely that which applies to European Union countries, according to the law, does not have validity in Macedonia. Therefore, in contrast to European countries that have rigorous inspections and quality checks and trying to control the huge import of toxic toys, in Macedonia that is almost mission impossible.

### **Definition of toy**

According to regulations of the Republic of Macedonia, "Law for safe products", children toy is any product or material produced and intended for playing children under the age of 14. It may be released into circulation only if they do not threaten the safety and health of children or on third parties and it is used in a predicted / intended way.

- Each toy, taking into account the period during which the toy can be used before, its circulation must meet basic safety and health conditions

prescribed by law. (By "put into circulation" means the sales and free distribution of the toy).

- If the toys do not meet basic safety requirements regarding the physical, mechanical, chemical, electrical and hygienic properties, they can not be released into circulation.
- They may not contain radioactive elements or substances.

Properties that may / may not contain the toys are prescribed by the Minister of Economy in accordance with the Minister of Health.

### **Labels in toys**

In order to reduce the risks of using the toys relating to safety and health, toys must be accompanied by appropriate clearly visible **warnings and written warnings**.

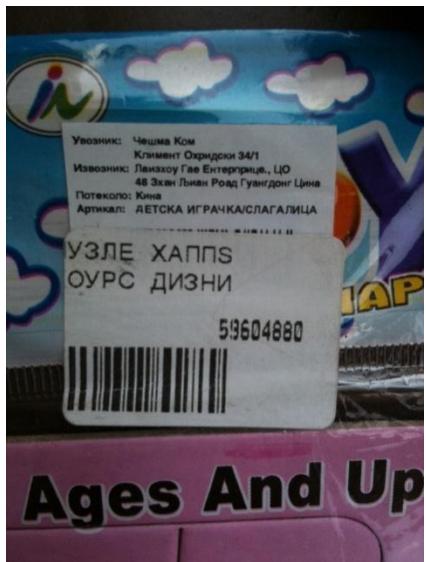
According the law it states that each toy that is found in market, or will be released into stores must contain a declaration that contains information that is true, clearly visible and readable, written in Macedonian language and Cyrillic alphabet. Besides the Macedonian language it is simultaneously possible that the declaration is in another language which is easily understandable for the consumer. Under the Consumer Protection declaration it must contain the following information:

- name of the product, or name under which the product is sold;
- composition of the product;
- way to maintain the product;
- way to use the product;
- industrial design, trademark or product label, if is considered as an important element of the product;
- date of production and expiry, if it is prescribed;
- name and address of the manufacturer or the merchant, if it has trademark for the product, and for the importer (full address of the importer) and country of origin;
- warning of possible danger in using, if such a threat exists;
- statement by the manufacturer for altered properties of the products ingredients of parts and accessories, or the type of the changes and

-statement of the manufacturer of products for compliance with the prescribed conditions;

For the declaration's data on imported products it is importer's responsibility. The contents of the declaration for individual products or group of products it is prescribed by the Ministry for economy, who is responsible for the proper area.

One example of declaration of toys in Macedonia looks following:



As it can be seen, the declaration states only the name of the importer and exporter, the origin of the toy and its name. (**According our law on the declaration must be the name of the company who export the toys, and the name of the company who import the toys i.e. the exporter is Play Mobil from Deutschland and importer is Atlantis from Macedonia**)

### The problems with labels

Even though the customs administration said that their job is to determine if the goods that are imported have all the necessary documentation, i.e. health sanitary safety, and if the number of documents corresponding to the number of imported toys, however most of the toys in sales comes through illegal roads.

In contrast to European Union countries where the 83 different toy items were removed from market, during 2010, among them American brand "Fisher-Price" with suspicion that they have too much lead in paint, most Macedonian stores have a huge number of toys from this manufacturer.

Importers of this brand, meanwhile, were complaining that can not pull off the dolls from sale, even they were informed of the withdrawal of them in the EU, because most of these toys are not imported directly from the company, but from another firm that has the franchise to work on the Balkans. However, the inattention of the parents while purchasing toys is actually playing with children's health. If toy do not have a declaration on the manufacturer, quality and composition, it should not be purchased because it is very likely to be harmful to health. So what parents should be careful when they are buying toys does the label have the following data:

- Does the toy have declaration that gives details for the manufacturer, country of origin, importer, distributor, quality, composition, and production date, method of use, maintenance or storage of the product?
- Does the toy have a warning about the harmful or dangerous actions, depending on age (an age limit when children can use the toy).
- When buying plastic toys people should be careful if there is written that the product is PVC FREE, and NON TOXIC. On the colored toys the declaration should contain the following - it is used a non-toxic safe colour.

### **Who is responsible for toy safety?**

The Ministries of Economy, Health Care, Labor, and Social Policy have responsibility for the environmentally sound management of toxic chemicals. In addition, the Agency for Labor Medicine and the Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management; and Urban Planning, Construction and Environment play a role in this issue area. Inter-ministerial cooperation on product and chemical safety is however limited.

Ministry of Health and Ministry of Economics are only responsible for the accuracy of those shipments that enter the country legally and which are planned to

be sold at certain places. Laboratory analysis are performed in certified laboratories, i.e. The National State Inspection and after there are checked there is permission for the toys to be released in the markets. “The label CE should be a guarantee in terms of accuracy, but the toy should have a health certificate from the manufacturer as well” – says from the Ministry of Health and add that annually are detected about 3% defective imported toys, and failure was addressed to the volatility of colors and plucking the hair of dolls.

Toy manufacturers often invest in marketing and new production, but not in research on the impact they have on children. About the quality of the products, that pass daily through the hands of boys and girls, is controlled by sanitary inspection, but almost no one deals with the question of what is the toy's impact on children.

Psychologist Aneta Penovska says that manufacturers of toys are not particularly interested to participate in improving the quality of their products. Toy just is not a matter for the game, it contained much importance –from who was given, how to be use, to its role in the life of the child. The connection of the situation of children and the demands of adults in relation to them are diffracted through toys. Experts note that the toy can sometimes be a companion in solitude, and sometimes can be wonderful source of research and discoveries.

Toys have their place in the family, science, technology, market, economics, marketing, and in the education too. They send many messages that are directed to children - from the worst, when the toy is subject to agreement for the drinking milk, good behaviour and grades, to the ambitious desire for their child to learn something.

The latest research in the world shows that children do not play creatively, they have problems in communication and they don't learn to control their behaviour during the game or to respect the others they play with. Some of this could be avoided if the children are in contact with good toy.

## **Prohibited in the EU, approved in Macedonia?**

Toys that are banned in the EU can be found in Macedonia in almost every shop. Some of them are the following:

### **Rubber toys - "Yellow Ducks"**

Country of origin: China.

Danger: chemical risk. This toy is a hazardous chemical risk because 40.5% of the weight is disonoril phthalate isonoril (DINP), which exceeds the allowed maximum of 0.1 percent of the allowable weight.

### **Ducks that drags and emit sounds**

Country of origin: Netherlands.

Danger: risk of poisoning.

This toy is a risk of poisoning for the children because it contains excessive amounts of lead and chromium in red color (618mg/kg of lead, chromium 113mg/kg).

### **Toys that emit sounds while pressing**

Country of origin: China.

Danger: breathlessness and chemical risk.

The product is a real risk of suffocation because the mechanism for playing during the tests is separated and stumble in the cylinder in to the small parts. This toy is a serious chemical risk because they contain phthalate 31.9 percent, and it is qualified as the second category of toxin degree for the raw materials.

### **Baby Fences**

Country of origin: Italy.

Danger: chemical risk.

This product is a serious chemical risk due to the fact that the plastic parts of the products contain excessive amounts of phthalate ester DEHP, 20,8% from the weight of the product.



## **Computer games**

What concerned lately is the fact that computers completely pushed aside the toys! Rather than playing with dolls and trucks, or with each other, girls and boys are becoming friends with the machine.

Technology developments and the increased presence and availability of computers in everyday children's life directly reflect on the way and content of the games. JCWE survey, which has been fulfilled from more than 500 parents, shows that a child that is 6 years old during the working day spends about 105 minutes front of the computer, while during the weekend that period increased by 50 minutes.



The project is implemented by JCWE



The project is lead by WECF

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