

Michigan Takes a Stand Against Lead in Children's Products

By Mike Shriberg

In a major victory for the Ecology Center, our partners in the Michigan Network for Children's Environmental Health (MNCEH), and for parents and children across the state, Governor Granholm signed a series of bills that limit lead in children's products just prior to the holidays. The protection comes amid public furor over recalls of children's toys because of high lead levels and just weeks after the Ecology Center, the MNCEH, and partner organizations launched www.healthytoys.org, the first consumer action guide to toxic chemicals in toys. The new Michigan standards protect children from high lead levels in products including toys, childcare articles, lunchboxes, and children's jewelry.

The state action is necessary because of the virtual lack of any federal regulation to protect children from toxics. According to *The New York Times*, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) only has one full-time person to test all toys that are imported into the country. Moreover, existing federal laws on lead apply only to lead levels in paint while the Michigan laws apply to lead in any component of a product.

There is no safe level of lead exposure for children, and there is no need for lead in children's products. Lead is a dangerous neurotoxicant that can permanently damage the brains, internal organs, and nervous systems of children. Michigan has the 6th highest rate of childhood lead poisoning in the nation. The Michigan bills (SB 174, HB 4132 & 4399) outlaw the sale or manufacture of toys and child-

care articles, jewelry, or lunchboxes that contain lead at levels above 600 parts per million (ppm).

House Bill HB 4936, which reconstitutes the Michigan Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Control Commission, also became law as part of this package of bills. This bill requires the Lead Commission, by March 31, 2008, to assess the 600-ppm standard for children's products and determine if it is protective enough for Michigan's children. This is significant because while these bills are a useful first step, health experts say a truly protective limit must be lower; 600 ppm is merely the standard used for recalls by the CPSC for lead in paint. This level fails to account for newer research on the hazards that lead poses even at very low levels. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently recommended that children's products should contain no more than 40 ppm of lead.

The Ecology Center and the MNCEH were critical in shaping these bills through testimony, legislative outreach, and activating our vast network of grassroots supporters. We will continue these efforts



to ensure that the lead thresholds get lowered to the one recommended by the AAP.

Of course, lead in toys is but one example of hazards from toxics that face Michigan's children. While these bills represent a step forward, they are only the first of several steps needed to truly protect children from a wide array of toxics in products.

For more information about the efforts of the Ecology Center and its partners to protect Michigan's children from toxic chemicals, visit www.ecocenter.org or www.mnceh.org.

Mike Shriberg is Policy Director for the Ecology Center.



Rep. Rebekah Warren, D-An Arbor, co-sponsored a "Take Your Kids' Toys to Work Day" for Michigan Legislators with the Ecology Center. Rep. Barb Byrum, D-Lansing, attended.