

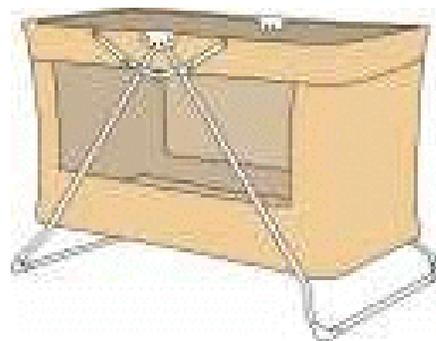
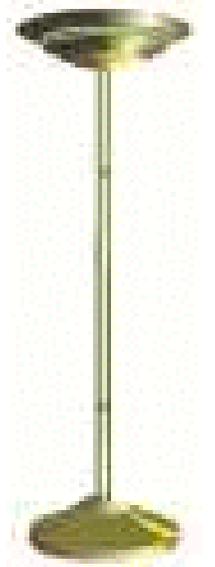
State of New York
Office of the Attorney General



THRIFTY, BUT SMART, SHOPPING

Tips for Consumers on

How to Avoid Purchasing Dangerous Secondhand Products



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Attorney General



STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Dear New Yorker:

Many New Yorkers buy used clothing, furniture, nursery products and other household items at thrift stores. But buyers need to be especially vigilant when purchasing secondhand items because of the hidden dangers associated with older consumer goods.

Investigations conducted by my office, through the Consumer Frauds and Protection Bureau, concluded that roughly 63% of thrift stores we surveyed in the state sell at least one product which does not meet industry standards, is banned or was recalled, or is in a dangerous state of disrepair. These products are considered hazardous because they pose the danger of death or serious injury.

Many of the dangerous items found at thrift stores are children's products, including clothing, walkers, cribs and toys. Additionally, thrift stores sell other secondhand household items, including hair dryers and halogen lamps, that no longer meet industry standards or are missing warning labels that would otherwise inform consumers about safety risks associated with the product.

Why are dangerous items showing up in thrift stores in such large numbers? One reason, as reflected in a report issued by my office in December of 2003, is that manufacturers typically retrieve only 10 to 30

percent of the units of a product that has been recalled. Why? Advertising and reporting of recalls is limited, the result of which is that crucial information about dangerous products often fails to reach affected consumers. Also, since children's items such as cribs and clothing are outgrown quickly and handed down or sold in garage sales, consumers unknowingly pass on outdated products that do not comply with significant new safety standards that address serious and sometimes life-threatening hazards.

This booklet has been assembled in an effort to help you avoid the purchase of dangerous products and to save you and your children from injury. Here you will find information on dangerous products sold secondhand at thrift stores or garage sales and how to check on the safety of products that might be hazardous or have been recalled. In addition, there is information on where to go to learn more about product safety issues and contact information to report unsafe products to the proper governmental regulators.

Consumers may also contact my office at (800) 771-7755 with any questions related to this booklet.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric T. Schneiderman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

ERIC T. SCHNEIDERMAN

DANGEROUS PRODUCTS SOLD SECONDHAND

Recalled Products

Every year, millions of consumer products are recalled due to safety problems. Between 1999 and 2002, the CPSC participated in more than 1,300 recalls involving approximately 305 million products, a vast majority of which were products intended for use by children and infants.

Recommendation: Consumers must be alert to the dangers posed by used products before they donate goods or purchase them at second-hand stores. There are resources available to consumers wishing to check a product to see if it has been the subject of a safety recall:

Comprehensive Recall Information

www.recalls.gov

Consumer Product Safety Commission

www.cpsc.gov 1-800-638-2772

Consumer Federation of America Foundation

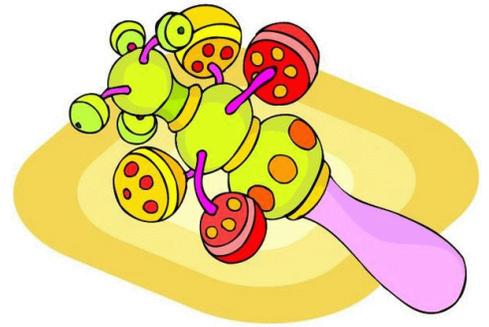
www.safechild.net

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

www.nhtsa.gov 1-800 424-9393 (child car seat recalls)

Labeling on Toys

Appropriate labels are important to guide consumers in the selection of toys that are suitable from an educational, developmental, and safety perspective.



Where toys do not have labels identifying the appropriate “age grading label,” they must conform to the most stringent criterion - the standards set for infants. Unfortunately, toys without age labels that do not conform to these requirements have been found in thrift stores and in other secondhand sales.

In addition, since 1994, specific warnings are required to be affixed to toys, balloons, and balls that present a choking hazard to young children because of small parts. Yet many thrift stores sell toys that predate the legislation and that therefore lack the life-saving information which the law now requires.

Of specific concern for infants are items with small parts or lengthy cords. Because children three years of age and younger have a tendency to put objects in their mouths, it is especially important to examine for small parts toys intended for the use of infants.

Small Parts Recommendation: If an object or part can fit into the cardboard roll of bathroom tissue, it is too small for children 3 years or younger. All toys made for children

between 3-6 years old are required to provide warnings about any choking hazards.

Look for sturdy construction, including tightly sewn seams and attached eyes and noses on all toys, especially stuffed animals. Durable products made of strong material also better withstand any chewing by children.

Cord-Length Recommendation: To protect against strangulation, industry standards limit to 12 inches any cords or elastic on toys for children under 18 months of age. Be careful not to purchase for infants toys on the secondhand market that do not comply with this industry standard.

Baby Gates

These expandable, accordion-style baby gates made before 1985 were meant to prevent toddlers from falling down stairs. Tragically, children have crawled through the wide gaps in these gates, causing strangulation. At least 1,500 children under age 5 suffer injuries related to baby gates each year and at least nine children have died from their injuries.

Recommendation: Don't buy accordion-style baby gates. If you already own them, dispose of them. Instead, chose baby gates with a straight top edge and rigid mesh screen, or gates with openings too small for a child's head to enter.

Baby Walkers

This children's product has traditionally been used to help young children learn how to stand and walk. Unfortunately, thousands of children are injured with



baby walkers each year. The deaths of at least 34 children have been linked to older baby walkers in the last 30 years. In 2001 alone, an estimated 6,200 children were treated for baby walker related injuries. These injuries include broken bones, bruises, cuts, concussion, internal injuries, skull fracture, and even death. Older walkers lack safety features to stop at the top of stairs.

Recommendation: Newer baby walkers meet current safety standards set in 1997 and are designed to prevent injuries and falls down stairs. Even so, many safety experts recommend that parents instead chose stationary activity centers, often referred to as “exercise-saucers,” instead of walkers.

However, if you want to provide your child with a walker, there are two new styles that meet current safety standards:

- Walkers with a base wider than the normal 36-inch doorway prevent a child from entering different rooms; and
- Walkers with rubber-like strips underneath or around the base that grip the floor and stop walkers at the edge of stairs.

Bath Seats and Rings

Between 1983 and June 2003, 104 deaths of children and 162 non-fatal incidents have been attributed to the use of bath seats or bath rings. These products give care givers a false sense of security increasing the likelihood that care givers will fail to provide the necessary close supervision of infants in water. Drowning incidents have occurred when the bath seats and rings tip over or when children slip through the leg openings. Indeed, many consumer groups have called for the ban of these infant products.

Since 2001, a voluntary industry standard has required suction cups that affix the seat to the tub.

Nonetheless, serious concerns have remained that bath seats are unstable and hazardous. The latest suction cups made to address tip-over problems, fail to prevent “submarining” - babies slipping between the leg openings - and infants falling out of the bath ring as it remains upright. Furthermore, suction cups are useless for tubs that have slip-resistant surfaces because they cannot form a tight seal on a textured surface.

Recommendation: Bath seats/rings should not be considered as a safety device. Use of bath seats/rings, even those produced with suction cups, remain a hazard. Close supervision of a baby in water, with or without a bath seat or

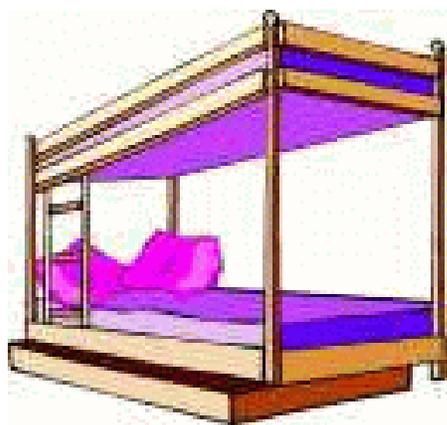
ring, is strongly recommended. In October 2003, federal regulators announced proposed mandatory performance standards and warning labels to address the dangers of bath seats and rings. However, many older bath seats and rings remain on the secondary market and should be avoided or used with great care.

Bean Bag Chairs with Foam Pellet Stuffing

Zippered bean bag chairs stuffed with small foam pellets and easy-to-use zippers are hazardous to young children. Children can unzip the bean bag, crawl inside, inhale or ingest the foam pellets and suffocate or choke. Five reported deaths and 27 non-fatal incidents have been associated with bean bag chairs in the past.

Since 1996, bean bag chairs have been manufactured with zippers that young children cannot open. However, at least 12 million bean bag chairs with zippers have been the subject of a safety recall, some of which may turn up in thrift stores.

Recommendation: Don't buy zippered bean bag chairs with easy-to-use zippers and if you own one, keep it away from children or dispose of it.



Bunk Beds for Children

Bunk beds are great for children who share a bedroom, but be careful: strangulation can

occur if a child can squeeze his/her body - but not his/her head - through side guardrails, leaving the bodies to hang. Children also can become trapped in the headboard or footboard or between the bed and the wall.

At least 58 young children have died by strangulation or suffocation in bunk beds. Most were 3 years old or younger.

Recommendation: Make sure that there are no more than 3 ½ inches between the guardrail and the bed frame or between the slats in any headboard or footboard. Also, a top bunk should have a guardrail on both sides of the mattress, even if the bed is used against a wall.

Cribs

In 1973 as many as 200 infant deaths every year were associated with cribs. In 1976, federal regulators adopted mandatory standards, including a requirement that slats or spindles be no more than 2 ¾ inches apart. In 1982, decorative cut-out headboards were prohibited due to strangulation concerns.



In order to address entanglement hazards, industry standards were enacted in 1986 and 1989 which set the height of crib corner posts to 1/16th inch above the cribs top rail.

Still today, more babies - about 40 each year - die from injuries associated with cribs than any other nursery equipment and most of these deaths are associated with older, used cribs.

Recommendation: It is important that parents and caretakers check a used crib carefully to ensure that it complies with the most recent stringent standards described above. For more information about crib safety, go to www.safechild.net.

Also, parents and caretakers must choose carefully the crib sheets they use. Crib sheets that do not properly fit crib mattresses, pose the risk that, when minimal pressure is exerted, the crib sheet easily pulls off. This presents a serious entanglement and possibly asphyxiation hazard. Be sure a fitted crib sheet fits its mattress snugly and securely.

Drawstring Clothing

Children's drawstring clothing is generally discovered more frequently in thrift stores than any other hazardous item. Between 1985 and 1999, at least 22 children were killed and nearly 50 others injured in incidents involving clothing with drawstrings. In many instances, the drawstrings became entangled in playground equipment, school bus and car doors, and even in fences, resulting in strangulation.



Since March 2003, New York State has prohibited the retail sale of children's drawstring clothing. This step should greatly reduce the number of articles of clothing with drawstrings in retail stores in New York State, as manufacturers who sell to New York retailers will need to offer compliant products to their customers. It may take longer, however, for the resale industry and consumers who donate used goods to become familiar with the new prohibitions on sales of drawstring clothing.



Recommendation: Discard any clothing with drawstrings that appears to be the size suitable for children 16 years and younger or remove the drawstring from the article of clothing. Drawstrings can easily be replaced with buttons, snaps or velcro.

Extension Cords

Each year roughly 3,100 people are treated for injuries involving electrical cords, including fire, shock and electrocution. There are at least 2,200 fires annually related to extension cords; dozens die, hundreds are injured. There is a risk that dangerous extension cords that do not meet current safety standards may be found in thrift stores.

Be mindful of household and power/outdoor extension cords for computers, household appliances, lamps, power equipment or other electrical products. Often electric heaters, air

conditioners, freezers, refrigerators, lamps, fans, televisions and holiday decorations are involved in electrical cord accidents.

Recommendation: Inspect every extension cord for the following:

- A permanently attached certification label, usually near the plug from an independent testing laboratory such as UL (Underwriters Laboratories) or ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratories);
- A polarized plug with two flat prongs, one wider than the other;
- A grounding plug with three prongs - two flat, one round - for power for outdoor three-wire extension cords;
- A firm, solid connection between the cord and the plug;
- No exposed or loose wires, or any cracks, corrosion, or other obvious signs of wear;
- Information on the cord's electrical capacity in amperes and watts (look for it on the certification label itself or on another permanently attached label nearby); and
- The wire size printed or stamped on the cord. Look for 16/2, 16/3 or a smaller number, such as 14 or 12. If you see 18 stamped on the cord, the cord may not be able to carry electrical current needed to operate many appliances safely.

As always, don't buy extension cords that don't meet proper safety standards, and if you own cords not in compliance, discard them.

Hair Dryers

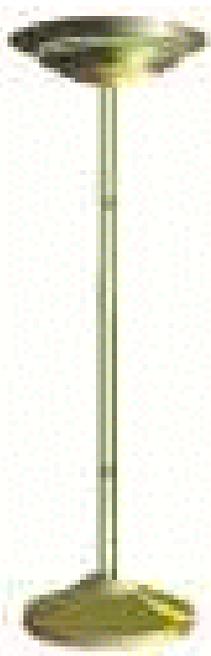
Hair dryers without the large rectangular-shaped plug at the end of the cord, known as an immersion protection device, pose an electrocution hazard.



Since voluntary safety standards were revised in 1991 requiring the immersion protection device, there have been no deaths associated with hair dryers. Older hair dryers without the safety devices, however, have caused an average of 18 electrocutions a year, many involving children under 10 years of age.

Recommendation: Don't buy or use older hair dryers without immersion protection devices. Also, check to be sure there is a certification mark from a recognized testing laboratory, such as UL (Underwriters Laboratories) or ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratories).

Halogen Floor Lamps



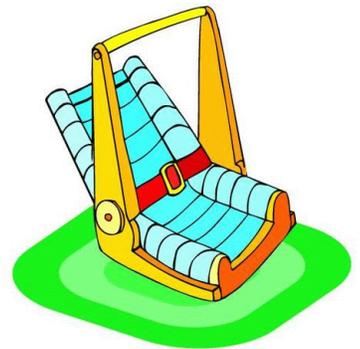
Halogen lamps are notorious for causing fires and overheating. A 300-watt halogen bulb can heat up to roughly 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit, putting any flammable material that comes in contact with a bulb at risk of catching on fire. Since 1998, the CPSC has received 65 reports of fires associated with halogen torchiere floor lamps which resulted in six deaths. As a result, CPSC has recalled for repairs of

approximately 40 million lamps manufactured before February 1997. Free wire guards are available by calling (800) 985-2220.

Recommendation: Don't buy or use a halogen lamp that does not have a wire or glass guard over the bulb. Also, bulb wattage should not be over 300 watts, even if the label says that more wattage could be used. As with all lamps, make sure the plug is polarized, meaning that one blade is wider than the other.

Infant Car Seats/Carriers

There have been 18 deaths and over 15,000 injuries associated with combination infant car seats/carriers, excluding motor vehicle accidents. While car seat/carriers are convenient, the handles can snap and release without warning or rotate suddenly, leading to serious injuries.



Recommendation: Inspect the label on the side of each infant car seat/carrier and look for the manufacturer's name, the model name (it may not appear) and the date of manufacture. Go to www.nhtsa.gov or www.cpsc.gov to determine if the car seat/carrier has been the subject of a safety recall. If you believe your car seat has been recalled, contact CPSC immediately at (800) 638-2772 or at info@cpsc.gov.

Remember to replace any car seat/carrier that has been involved in a car crash because the unit may have been weakened.

Also, in order to increase your chances of purchasing a car seat/carrier that has the latest and safest design, never purchase a secondhand car seat/carrier more than six years old.

Infant Swings

Between 1990 and 1999, 25 infant deaths were associated with various infant swings. Each year, there are more than 1,000 hospital emergency room visits due to injuries associated with portable infant swings.

Recommendation: Although there are no mandatory or industry standards, parents should:

- carefully follow the manufacturer's guidelines for size and weight;
- look for swings that have seat belts with waist and crotch straps;
- avoid swings that use a carrier or cradle bed that would allow a baby to lie face down. This presents risk of suffocation because an infant may slide forward until his/her face is against the side of the carrier.

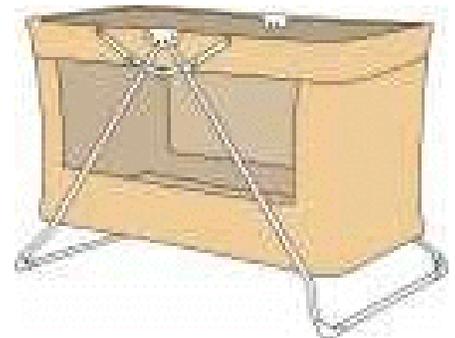
Because there have been numerous recalls involving millions of swings, it is strongly recommended that you check any used swing against the CPSC's recall list. To do so, contact the CPSC at 800-638-2772 or go to www.cpsc.gov.

Play Yards/Playpens

Play yards, the modern term for playpens, are also referred to as "port-a-cribs." Since 1998, the CPSC reports that more than 200 infants have died in play yards.

Recommendation: Consumers should look for play yards that have:

- Mesh holes no larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and/or slats in a wooden play yard no more than $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches apart;
- a height of its sides at least 20 inches from the top of the mattress pad to the top of the rail;
- latches that lock automatically to avoid collapsing;
- a mattress pad that fits snugly and securely in the play yard; and
- no protruding hardware or rivets.



Portable Lamps

Freestanding portable floor lamps and table lamps that use incandescent bulbs can present a fire, electrocution, shock or burn hazard. Such lamps and light bulbs cause about 3,900

fires, 20 deaths, and 210 injuries a year. In addition, about 15 electrocutions are caused by lamps and light fixtures annually.

Recommendation: Don't buy any freestanding portable lamps with incandescent bulbs if they have any of the following hazards:

- The plug is not polarized, meaning that one blade is wider than the other;
- Signs of corrosion or bent or loose parts indicate a malfunctioning or potentially hazardous lamp;
- Bulb wattage is higher than 60 watts unless the lamp itself indicates a higher wattage can be used; or
- The bulb surface is too close to the lamp shade, harp or any other surface. Allow for at least ¼ inch distance.

Check the sockets for signs of overheating, which are typically found on the paper or fiber insulation between the outer brass part and the inner screw shell of the socket.



Strollers and Baby Carriages

In 1999 alone, 14,000 infants and toddlers went to hospital emergency rooms with injuries related to the use of strollers and carriages.

Although there are no mandatory governmental requirements, a voluntary safety standard provides important protections. In

order for a carriage or a stroller to be certified as complying with this safety standard, it must:

- have a locking device to protect against unintentional folding-up;
- have a restraint system;
- be able to hold sufficient weight and remain stable even when a child is standing or climbing on it;
- have instructional guidelines provided by the manufacturer; and
- have no hazardous edges or protrusions.

Recommendations: Check with the JPMA to determine if a specific stroller model or carriage has been certified as complying with the above safety standards. Go to <http://www.jpma.org/>

Also, only consider for purchase strollers that:

- have a footrest that can be put upright to close off the leg opening and protect a child from submarining; (between 1986 and 1992, 11 children died after becoming entrapped by the head through the leg opening);
- have a durable restraint system, including a crotch strap that loops into a waist belt;
- have brakes that work adequately;
- have attachable shopping baskets or bags directly over or in front of the rear wheels to prevent tipping over the stroller.

In addition, there have been numerous safety recalls for strollers/carriages. Be sure to check with CPSC to see if a particular model is affected.

Toy Chests

Chests and boxes with hinged lids can be dangerous, especially to children. This includes items such as trunks, cedar chests, wicker chests, footlockers, decorator cubes, and wooden storage chests. Lids can fall on children's heads or necks, causing injury or death. Likewise, children who climb inside hinged chests or boxes to hide or sleep can suffocate. Numerous toy chest-related injuries and deaths have been reported.

Recommendation: Make sure that a chest has:

- A spring-loaded lid support that will keep the lid open without adjustment;
- No latch that could trap a child inside; and
- At least two ventilation holes either on the top, the front or the sides.



Other Hazardous Items Found at Thrift Stores

Investigators have found other items at thrift stores that, although not the subject of a recall or advisory, may pose significant safety risks to the purchaser and his/her family. Be mindful of the following hazards:

- Products may be broken in such a way as to pose a serious danger to children. Play yards with large holes in mesh sides, damaged strollers and infant carriers and high chairs that can tip over were all found at thrift stores.
- Children's products that lack the appropriate safety restraints. Older models of children's products - rocking horses and high chairs - may be charming, however, safety needs to come first.
- Children's products that lack identifying information, something crucial to be able to determine if a product has been the subject of a recall or safety alert.
- Products sold without original boxes or packaging may lack important safety instructions or crucial warnings. Reach out to the CPSC and/or the manufacturer to confirm that the product has not been the subject of a recall or safety alert.

TO LEARN MORE ON BUYING SAFE SECONDHAND PRODUCTS

Subscribe to CPSC e-mail recall alert list. By visiting the site below you can find out when certain types of products are recalled. Visit www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.asp for more details. You may also search the site for press releases related to previously recalled products.

The Consumer Federation of America Foundation's www.safechild.net, is a useful site for parents. The site has plenty of useful information on toy recalls, toy safety tips and a searchable toy recall database. It also provides a monthly e-mail notification service for recalls.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration provides information on child car seat recalls and safety at www.nhtsa.gov. In addition, six federal agencies have joined together to develop a website with comprehensive recall information at www.recalls.gov.

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION:

Attorney General's Office
Consumer Frauds and Protection Bureau
120 Broadway
New York, NY 10271
(800) 771-7755
Hearing impaired: (800) 788-9898

www.ag.ny.gov

Consumer Product Safety Commission
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(800) 638-2772
Hearing impaired: (800) 638-8270
www.cpsc.gov

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
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www.nhtsa.gov

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