

Senate should act on toxic toy bills

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Legislation passed by the Michigan House, but now bogged down in the Senate, would require manufacturers to disclose what their toys are made from.

It sounds like a simple request. And while we're not excited about more legislative regulations, these seem to be needed. We understand bottom lines are critical these days, but there shouldn't be much extra cost involved, and we're talking about the safety of our children.

Reportedly, toys ranging from necklaces made by Disney to Mattel's Ballerina Barbie are composed from substances toxic to children.

China, as usual, seems to be a culprit — but it isn't the only one. American manufacturers have shipped millions of jobs overseas, and the foreign countries are sending us back their toxic waste. The exchange is not equitable, fair or even reasonable.

So requiring companies to at least let parents know what their young children might be playing with is reasonable.

The seven-bill package — House Bills 4763-4769 — was proposed by Democrats and is called the Children's Safe Products Act.

It would require the Michigan Department of Community Health to create a list of chemicals of concern and to identify those of highest concern by 2012.

Toy manufacturers would be required to notify the state of the chemicals contained in their products. The bills establish hefty fines for companies that don't comply. Fines start at \$5,000 for a first offense, \$25,000 for a second offense, \$50,000 for a third offense and \$150,000 for knowingly violating the act.

Mike Shreiber of the Ecology Center in Ann Arbor has reported that about a third of 3,000 toys tested in a recent study were found to have high levels of toxic chemicals. He commented that, as an example, a plastic ear of corn contained five times the legal limit of lead.

One strong argument for passage of these bills comes from local toy shops. At least three independent toy retailers in Oakland County are supporting the legislation. Providing particular leadership are Jack Parish of the Doll Hospital and Toy Soldier Shop in Berkley and Susan Kelke of Root & Sprout Hop Scotch Children's Store in Birmingham.

Also on the local list is Small Planet Creative Learning AmeriKid in West Bloomfield Township.

Outlets like these are on the front line of toy sales, and if they are concerned, the general public should be as well.

Local state representatives who support the bills include Democrats Vicki Barnett of Farmington Hills and Lisa Brown of West Bloomfield, who are primary sponsors.

Also favoring the bills were Democrats Marie Donigan of Royal Oak, Tim Melton of Auburn Hills and Vincent Gregory of Southfield.

Some things seem to be no-brainers, although there also are some legislators who can make political issues out of any topic.

This package of laws, whether drafted by Democrats or Republicans, seems to be needed.

The toys affected by this legislation were made offshore, and parents have no idea what's in them.

The legislation can be found online at www.legislature.mi.gov. Information about toys and toxins is available at www.healthytoys.org.

The bills easily sailed through the House, and we urge senators to just as quickly move them through the Senate.