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## **Regulators, science kit makers clash over possible 'toxic' paper clips**

Science kits – and some of the items they contain, including paper clips used to show children how magnets work -- could require more stringent safety testing if the Consumer Product Safety Commission determines that the kits are “children’s products.” Science kit makers, meanwhile, argue that the items in the kits aren’t harmful to children and are everyday items found in homes and schools that don’t need to be tested when they are purchased separately.

The manufacturers asked for a testing exemption, but the CPSC would not grant a blanket waiver. In a 3-2 vote, CPSC approved a “guidance” that is supposed to help determine which products require testing under legislation passed by Congress two years ago that requires safety checks for items such as lead, chemicals and flammable materials.

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After the vote, CPSC chairman Inez Tenenbaum said that “there is nothing in this rule that bans science kits.” The manufacturers, however, have threatened to cease supplying kits to elementary school children because of the testing requirement.

The approved document does not explicitly demand testing of the kits or their components. It does, however, indicate that how the kits are packaged and marketed (for example, whether they are intended for children 12 or under) could determine whether testing is required.

The science kit manufacturers say that a CPSC guidance subjects their products to a double standard – i.e. paper clips bought at an office supply store would not need to be tested, while those in the science kit would be. “They miraculously become a children’s product when our clients pick those products up and put them in a science kit,” a manufacturers’ representative said.

Two CPSC commissioners criticized the guidance. Anne Northup said the guidance should have carved out products that pose little or no risk. “We are not making reasonable decisions,” she said. Another commissioner, Nancy Nord, wrote on her blog that “it is crazy that the Hands-On Science Partnership needs to be concerned about doing lead tests on products purchased at an office supply store and then packaged into a science teaching kit for use with children. Even crazier is the fact that if a teacher buys the same paper clip at the same store and uses it for the same science teaching project, it’s okay.”

Consumer advocates, however, maintain the tests must be performed “to ensure that products for children are safe.”

Source: [Associated Press](#)

You can view the CPSC decision [here](#) on page 35.

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