

# UT researcher helps develop green toy standards

February 23 2012

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Catherine Wilt, director of the Center for Clean Products at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment, is working to make toys healthier, safer, and more environmentally-friendly.

Wilt helped develop North America's first and only third-party environmental toy standard, UL 172, introduced this month by UL Environment, a subsidiary of Underwriters Laboratories. Under the voluntary certification, manufacturers have the opportunity to demonstrate environmental leadership and a commitment to safeguarding children's health by pursuing the certification. The standard recognizes companies which use safer chemicals and healthier, more environmentally-preferable materials in toys.

"While there are standards addressing the safety of toys, such as choking hazards, there are no North American standards to address toxicity," Wilt said. "Toxic toy recalls in recent years have made consumers increasingly wary about the safety of toys. Certification to UL 172 will provide them with peace of mind while giving innovative manufacturers the credit they deserve."

According to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, there were at least forty-five toxic toy recalls between 2008 and 2011. All forty-five recalls involved toys that were manufactured outside the US. While a North American organization manages UL 172, any toy manufacturer in the world can apply for certification of applicable products.

UL 172 requires testing and verification to ensure that toys do not contain measurable carcinogens, certain neurotoxins, reproductive toxins, anti-microbial agents, heavy metals, or added fragrances. Its criteria meet or exceed US and European Union requirements for toy toxicity.

The standard places strict limits on emissions of volatile organic compounds, a key contributor to childhood asthma and helps minimize pollution generated by the production, use, and disposal of toys and their packaging.

“This standard is an important step in promoting greener, healthier toys for children,” Wilt said. “Through restricting content such as heavy metals, known carcinogens, and other human health hazards, while encouraging practices like socially and environmentally responsible manufacturing with sustainably sourced materials, this standard will enable parents, grandparents, and other toy buyers to make toy purchases they feel confident about.”

Since 2009, Wilt has led an expert advisory committee, developing the scientific and social underpinnings of certification standards. The advisory committee also took public comments from more than 150 stakeholders from the United States and Canada. Those collaborations resulted in a robust standard that will recognize green environmental leaders in the toy industry.

The Center for Clean Products is an internationally recognized leader in the development of environmental product certifications, having developed environmental standards for products and industries as diverse as cleaning products to office electronics and now children’s toys. These standards contribute to millions of dollars in green purchases annually and promote products that reduce negative impacts to human health and the environment.

UL 172 is applicable to play products made from wood, plastic, rubber, textiles, metal, and bio-based materials—from balls and action figures to costume clothing and jewelry. Due to the high number and diversity of toy components on the market today, certain categories of [toys](#)—such as arts and crafts; cosmetics; video games; sporting equipment; furniture; and juvenile products, like strollers and car seats—are not covered by the standard at this time. Nevertheless, UL 172 is the first standard of its kind in North America.

UL Environment is a non-profit organization which helps companies achieve their sustainability goals and consumers find products they can trust. For more information, visit [www.ul.com/environment](http://www.ul.com/environment)

Provided by University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Citation: UT researcher helps develop green toy standards (2012, February 23) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-02-ut-green-toy-standards.html>

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