

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection hearing entitled "Protecting Children from Lead-Tainted Imports"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, TRADE, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION HEARING ENTITLED "PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM LEAD-TAINTED IMPORTS"
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I begin by thanking Chairman Rush and Ranking Member Stearns for holding this hearing today. As I said during this Subcommittee's May 15 hearing, a country's highest responsibility is to protect its children. I am pained to say that it appears we all have been derelict. It is this Subcommittee and our full Committee in determine the sources of this lapse and to take all necessary steps to correct it.

It would be far too easy to attribute this summer's recalls of children's toys and other products to China's poorly regulated export manufacturers. To be sure, China is not without blame. But regulatory deficiencies, shoddy business practices, and the forces of globalization all play a substantial role in this catastrophe. In short, there is enough blame to go around.

Appearing before us today are the two commissioners from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). As the Nation's consumer safety watchdog, the CPSC bears significant responsibility for protecting America's children. Yet it has remained largely underfunded since its inception and of late, has endured an exodus of competent staff. In addition, the CPSC's testing laboratory is an embarrassment. I expect that Acting Chairman Nord and Commissioner Moore will help our Committee strengthen the CPSC by answering the following questions:

• How have CPSC's dwindling resources affected its ability to intercept dangerous products at U.S. ports?
• Has a reliance on voluntary industry compliance given rise to the recent toy and other children's products recall crises?

Lastly, I would insist that Acting Chairman Nord discuss in detail the agreement recently concluded between the CPSC and the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection, and Quarantine (AQSIQ). More precisely, what, in terms of concrete results, are we to expect of this agreement?

Also appearing before us today is Mattel's CEO, Robert Eckert. This company's practices should reflect Mattel's role as an industry leader, yet I am concerned about an apparent disdain for Federal regulations and laws present in some public statements. The front page of the September 4, 2007, Wall Street Journal reported Mr. Eckert's comments that Mattel discloses problems on its own timetable because it believes both the law and the CPSC's enforcement practices are unreasonable.

I further wish to convey my great disappointment that Mattel made little demonstrable effort to comply with the request of a bipartisan delegation of Committee on Energy and Commerce staff recently in Hong Kong to meet with its internal investigators and quality control staff. I expect that Mr. Eckert will answer this Subcommittee's questions about the status and intent of Mattel's internal investigation of its recalls this summer with clarity and precision. Lastly, I have heard the CEO's apology for lead-tainted toys, but I would seek reassurances about the pledge to improve the safety of Mattel's products, given Mattel's past resistance to cooperating with the CPSC over the safety of another toy, Power Wheels.

I look forward to the Subcommittee's second day of proceedings on this matter. In particular, I find it prudent that we explore the following:

- How should the U.S. structure future trade agreements to enhance the protection of the American consumer?
- How can the U.S. and others compel China to enforce its own regulations?
- What sort of quality control practices should U.S. businesses employ in China to ensure supply chain integrity?
- How do cost pressures applied by large U.S. retailers to toy and other manufacturers diminish quality control?

The answers to these questions and others will inform the Committee's work to improve our ability to protect our consumers and their children. We will remain vigilant in this task and produce tangible results. I thank the Chairman again for holding this hearing and look forward to the testimony of the witnesses.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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