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NEWS RELEASE

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Washington, D.C. – The Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection concluded a two-day hearing this afternoon on the recent discoveries of lead paint and unsafe levels of lead in toys and other products imported from China.

The hearing explored the health impacts on children from exposure to lead; the global economic forces and business practices that contribute to the importation of products that do not meet U.S. standards; and the activities of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to establish lead limits and enforce product recalls. Testimony from this hearing will help the Committee determine the type of legislation needed to address the problem of imported and domestically manufactured products that are dangerous to children. Another major concern is products with design flaws; North American toymakers have recalled 15.8 million toys containing magnets over the past year, compared to 2.3 million toys recalled due to lead paint, according to a September 12 Washington Post article.

"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," said Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. "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."

"It is difficult to believe that children are still being exposed to the dangers of lead, given federal law banned the neuro-toxin in paint almost 30 years ago. Incredibly, children now face lead exposure from a far more innocuous source: the toys they play with," said Rep. Bobby L. Rush (D-IL), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection. "As such, it is important that all parties in the chain of commerce — from media companies that market popular icons such as Elmo and Dora the Explorer, to toy manufacturers and importers, to retail outlets, to the Congress and the CPSC — take ownership of this problem and earnestly work to fix the problem at all costs. The health and well-being of our children is far too important for us to tolerate needless finger-pointing and petty squabbling. Our kids can afford to be childish. We can't."

Today's hearing included testimony from ten witnesses representing a range of industry groups and consumer advocate groups, as well as industry, trade, and health experts. Lori Wallach, Director of Global Trade Watch, a 160,000-member environmental and consumer group that promotes government and corporate accountability in the globalization and trade arena, suggested ways to improve import reliability, including third-party inspections in Chinese plants, higher fines for importers who sell tainted goods, increased inspections at U.S. borders and overseas, and inspection fees for U.S. companies that import cheaper goods from abroad. Gary Knell, CEO and President of Sesame Workshop — a group whose copyrighted toys were recalled by Mattel earlier this summer due to findings of lead — pledged to update the company's informational video on lead exposure prevention "Sesame Street Lead Away" and distribute it to half a million doctors' offices nationwide.

Yesterday's witnesses included CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord, CPSC Commissioner Thomas Moore and Mattel CEO Robert Eckert. During questioning, Dingell asked of Chairman Nord, "Is it your understanding that the Chinese negotiations in reference to consumer safety and exports and things of that kind are adequate to protect our consumers?" Nord replied that she did not know. Thomas Moore emphasized the need to strengthen U.S. export standards to ensure that our own manufactured products meet the standards to which imports are held.

As part of the Committee's inquiry, letters were sent to 19 importers on August 22 requesting detailed information about each company's lead-tainted products and policies for testing imported goods. The letters and the companies' responses are posted on the Committee website, <http://energycommerce.house.gov>. The site also contains the webcast and witness testimony from today's hearing, and further information on the Committee investigation.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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