

From: Rick Woldenberg
Sent: Tuesday, November 25, 2008 12:32
To: Rick Woldenberg
Subject: USA Today Article on Phthalates Ban

The Honorable Janice Schakowsky
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives

Dear Representative Schakowsky,

I am writing to protest your remarks made in the November 19 article featured in USA Today titled "Toys with phthalates can be sold after U.S. ban takes effect" (see http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-11-19-phthalate-federalban_N.htm). I want to bring to your attention that your words, while well-intentioned, are having a significant chilling effect on commerce in the entire children's product field. By sowing doubt, your quotes discourage trade with all companies, good and bad, creating innocent victims through overly broad assertions.

When you express concern about "fire sales" of toys with high lead levels or suggest that consumers need to be protected from "toxic chemicals" in toys, a dangerous taint spreads across the entire industry and all products in the category. As a trusted and influential national figure associated with consumer advocacy, your remarks constitute a warning to consumers – stay away from all toys and all toy stores because dangerous products are for sale there. This is a direct reflection on OUR business – and we do not deserve this unfortunate label. Many companies in the children's products field are suffering economically as the media feasts on such remarks. A recent study by the consulting firm Deloitte found that the effect of a product quality scare can affect buying decisions for at least nine months (see http://voices.washingtonpost.com/thecheckout/2008/10/recalls_drive_away_customers_f.html). Fear among our consumers has already caused longtime, loyal customers to doubt our products and doubt our integrity despite our peerless record of safety and concern for consumers. I think it is irresponsible for a national figure to risk this kind of misimpression at any time, but especially so during a severe economic downturn. There are literally jobs at stake here.

Naturally, as a business manager in the toy industry, I resent the implication that we might not be concerned about safety. While you may have not meant to refer to us, your broad statements are taken by the general public to apply to all companies in the field, including our company. By tarring everyone with the same brush by implication, extending a reasonable concern over limited facts and circumstances into a broad-based fear of everything and everyone, your words make it impossible to defend our practices or achievements to consumers or our dealers. We are not the "bad guys" and should be not subject to attack in the papers for bad acts we never committed. I think it is reasonable to ask that you make this distinction clearly when you address the subject of safety.

I hope you will take the opportunity to correct these misimpressions in future interviews and will generally moderate your tone in discussing our products and our market. We are an important part of the economy and provide jobs to people living in your district. If we are not all careful, we will throw the baby out with the bathwater here – even if the baby is "safer", the tumble will not leave it better off.

Sincerely,

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