



Regulatory Initiative

September 15, 2003

Proposed Ban of Baby Walkers

Health Canada has concluded that the inherent nature of baby walkers poses significant and unnecessary risks to infants. Health Canada's **Consumer Product Safety Bureau** is seeking the views of Canadians on a proposal that, under the *Hazardous Products Act*, would legally ban the sale, advertisement and importation of baby walkers into Canada. The proposed regulatory action is supported by a number of stakeholders including the Canadian Paediatric Society as well as Safe Kids Canada.

Background

Baby walkers are designed for infants who are able to sit up but not yet able to walk on their own. Although available in different designs, most baby walkers consist of a rigid frame set upon a wheeled base which allows the infant to be more mobile. Within the rigid frame is a seat that supports the infant while also allowing the child's feet to be in

contact with the floor. Thus, the infant can move about freely without a parent's help.

In 1989, in cooperation with the Canadian Juvenile Products Association, the Government of Canada established a voluntary industry standard to address a growing number of safety concerns with baby walkers. The standard's stringent stipulations and the support of the Association resulted in a rapid phase out of baby walkers from the marketplace.

In 1997, however, the Canadian Juvenile Products Association ceased to exist. Although most major retailers have refrained from re-introducing these products into Canada, and such products are not manufactured in Canada, baby walkers are available to Canadians through second-hand sales, street vendors, electronic commerce and some retail outlets.

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Health Canada

Rationale

Baby walkers afford infants an abnormal degree of mobility at a vulnerable stage in their development. This prematurely exposes them to a number of hazards for which infants cannot be expected to have developed the reflexes or cognitive skills to limit any potential injuries to themselves. As baby walkers can enable infants to move at speeds of up to one metre per second, even the most attentive parents may not be able to react quickly enough to prevent an injury from occurring.

Baby walkers enable infants to rapidly propel themselves close to hot or dangerous appliances such as fireplaces and radiators and near dangling electrical cords of kettles, frying pans, irons or similar items. The severity of the recorded injuries from falling down stairs is greatly compounded as a direct consequence of the infant having been placed in a baby walker. As a result, numerous Canadian infants in baby walkers have incurred injury including serious burns, severe head trauma and in one instance death.

Health Canada's *Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program* (CHIRPP), which collects information from 10 pediatric and 6 general hospitals across Canada, reports that the head was the body part most affected in baby walker related injuries. For the period 1994-1995, CHIRPP reported 451 incidents related to baby walkers with 89.6% involving children under one year of age. During this same period, CHIRPP records indicate that 83.6% of the injuries resulted from falls downstairs.

In the United States, where baby walkers continue to be sold, their *National Electronic Injury Surveillance System* indicates that, during the year 2000, 7400 infants were injured while using these products. A Health Canada study, titled *Testing of Baby Walkers*, on the safety of baby walkers conforming to American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) Standard F977-00, *Standard Consumer Safety Specification for Infant Walkers* revealed that these products (even when manufactured with safety features such as anti-skid strips) continue to pose significant risks to infants.

There is no evidence demonstrating that baby walkers benefit a child's development. In fact, continually placing infants in these products reduces their opportunity to learn to crawl, gain their sense of balance and stand up on their own. All of these are considered to be important steps in learning to walk. These products also encourage infants to lean forward from the hip while at the same time unnaturally preventing the infants from falling.

Your Comments

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that Canadians have the opportunity to participate in the development of regulatory initiatives. You are invited to forward your comments by mail, e-mail or fax to the Consumer Product Safety Bureau by November 3, 2003.

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