

‘Button’ batteries pose a risk

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“Unfortunately, when a recall is issued, these products don’t just vanish. They wind up in people’s homes, at second-hand shops or posted online at sites like eBay or Craigslist,” Madigan said. “This guide is an easy-to-use resource for parents who are already busy enough without monitoring the dizzying number of recalls and dangerous products. I encourage everyone to use this guide as they make holiday purchases and to check their homes for dangerous products.”

Joining Madigan at the Illinois Poison Center were representatives from Children’s Memorial Hospital, the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Kids in Danger, Safe Kids USA and the Illinois Public Interest Research Group.

The Attorney General’s 2011 Safe Shopping Guide details products that have been recalled over the past year and pose a significant danger to children. In 2011, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has issued 91 children’s product recalls, covering more than 8 million individual items that include toys, jewelry, cribs, furniture, baby gear and clothing.

Risk of Button Batteries on the Rise

As part of this year's guide, Madigan alerted parents and caregivers to a growing risk to children from "button" batteries, which are increasingly found in household items and, if ingested, can cause severe and even fatal injuries.

"Button" batteries are the small, silver disc-shaped batteries used to power a growing number of household electronics – remote controls, bathroom scales, garage door openers, handheld video games, cell phones and watches—and are often used in singing greeting cards. In many of these products, the batteries are easy for young children to access and remove from the item.

"Button batteries are a hidden threat in most of our homes. They are as small as a nickel but can cause big problems for young children," Madigan said. "It only takes a second for a toddler to put one of these in their mouth. Parents need to know how dangerous these batteries are so they can keep their children safe."

If ingested, a battery can lodge in a child's throat and cause permanent damage within as little as two hours. The battery creates an electric current, causing a chemical burn that can harm the esophagus, vocal chords and the aorta. The Attorney General said the threat is particularly alarming because of how quickly a swallowed battery can inflict harm. Parents often arrive at an emergency room unaware of what their child has ingested, and in an x-ray, doctors and nurses say the batteries look like other less threatening items commonly ingested by children – such as a coin.

The injury risk due to button batteries has increased two-fold: As button batteries are used to power more electronics, their presence in households has increased, and manufacturers have strengthened the power of the batteries, creating a more powerful current and increasing the burn risk if ingested.

Reports indicate that from 1985 to 2007, there has been a 6.7-fold increase in the percentage of button battery ingestions. Nationally, there have been 10 deaths due to button battery ingestion since 2008. In Illinois, the Illinois Poison Center received 93 calls in 2010 related to the batteries, including 77 concerning children and teens. In 2011, there have been 80 calls to the center, 70 of which were related to children or teenagers. Most of the victims are children and infants, with studies showing that 85 percent of major injuries from swallowing a button battery affected children under 4.

As consumers embark on the holiday shopping season, more electronics and gifts containing button batteries will be brought into homes, and Madigan said parents must be aware of the dangers they pose to help avoid tragedy. The

Attorney General's Safe Shopping Guide details for parents the risk associated with button batteries and urges them to ensure any items containing these batteries are secured in a safe place. Consumers can view and download the guide at Attorney General Madigan's website, www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov, or request a copy in the mail by calling the Attorney General's Recall Hotline at 1-888-414-7678.

The guide is part of Attorney General Madigan's ongoing effort to protect children by educating families on the dangers of having recalled items in their homes. Toys, cribs and other items may already be in children's homes and places they visit, like daycare centers and the homes of grandparents or other relatives. The guide is especially important for consumers who will shop at second-hand stores or online at sites like eBay or Craigslist, as some second-hand sellers may not keep up with the growing number of recall items that may be in their inventory.