

Energizer makes button battery packages safer for kids

by Kim Painter, Special for USA TODAY

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Nationwide Children's Hospital

This is an X-ray of a button battery lodged in a child's throat.

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Battery maker Energizer says it is making the packaging on its coin-sized button batteries more child-resistant and adding new warnings to packages and batteries, in response to increasing reports of small children swallowing such batteries and getting seriously injured.

Other companies say they also are taking steps to protect kids from the dangerous little batteries.

Energizer, which says it is the first to strengthen packages for the products, was already working with an advocacy group, Safe Kids USA, in a [campaign to warn parents](#) and other caregivers about the dangers. More than 40,000 kids were treated in emergency rooms for injuries related to swallowing batteries between 1997 and 2010, said a [recent report](#) from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Consumer Products Safety Commission. Batteries can cause choking, internal burns and, sometimes, death. Coin-sized button batteries are the most frequent culprits.

The lithium batteries are used in everything from mini remote controls to watches, hearing aids, greeting cards and toys. A [study published in Pediatrics](#) in 2010 found that kids who swallowed them got the batteries out of devices more than 60% of the time. Just 8% of cases involved kids getting the batteries directly out of

packages.

In a [press release](#), Energizer also said it is adding warning icons and statements to packages and placing stickers directly on the batteries to alert parents to the need to keep them out of the reach of children.

Duracell also has added new icons and warnings and has plans to improve packaging, company representative Win Sakdinan said in an e-mail. Panasonic, another major battery maker, does not sell button batteries directly to consumers, but it does sell many products that contain them and has made all the battery compartments in those products child resistant, says company representative Jim Reilly.

But safety advocates hope additional companies -- including all manufacturers of products that contain the batteries -- will make changes to protect kids, says Safe Kids president Kate Carr. The Consumer Products Safety Commission is talking with the companies about making voluntary changes, such as making battery compartments harder to open, she says. There's also proposed legislation that would make changes mandatory.

Parents and other caregivers can do their part by keeping batteries and battery-powered

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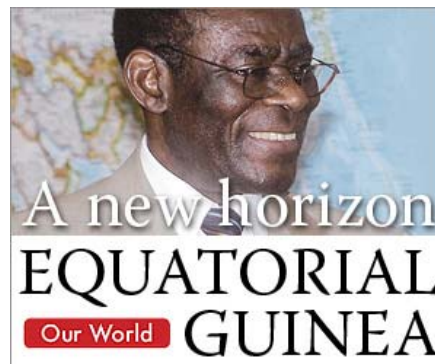


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devices away from kids, Carr says. She also suggests using strong tape to secure battery compartments that are easy to open. And she urges parents who suspect a child has swallowed a battery to get to an emergency room and request an X-ray right away. Once a battery is swallowed, moisture from the child's throat can spark a current that starts burning through tissue.

"You want the diagnosis as fast as possible because long-lasting damage can occur in as little as two hours," Carr says. The batteries can become lodged in a child's esophagus, she says, and "literally burn a hole through it."

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Anthony M. Sanders · ★ Top Commenter
 Great! I'll never be able to open a button battery package as long as I live.
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Michael Wilson · Middleburg Heights, Ohio
 If you read the article only 8% of kids were able to open the actual packages, while 60% were able to open the toys containing the batteries. So, I agree that something needs to be done, but it doesn't have anything to do with Energizer. It has to do with parents leaving toys and batteries around children and yes, I have a 3 1/2 year old!
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Bill Hart · ★ Top Commenter
 I would also think that the toy manufacturers and others, would make it so kids could not open the button battery compartment with out tools.
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Abe Froman · ★ Top Commenter · Las Vegas, Nevada
 It's so sad we force manufacturers to do this. I can just imagine a parent taking their child to the hospital for swallowing a battery and saying "But there was no warning telling me not to let my kid eat it! How was I supposed to know?"
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Wayne Eden · ★ Top Commenter · Works at Donkey poop picker-upper at 4E ranch
 can't they coat them in something that tastes so awful that any kid would just spit them out? maybe broccoli flavored, or beets.
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Michael Edwards · ★ Top Commenter
 The watch dogs also need to alert congress that pennies become batteries when ingested, thanks to our once lame coins now a combination of copper and zinc. Add acid and voila-a battery! Bring on the plastic...
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Jack Briss · ★ Top Commenter
 The kids get the batteries because the PARENTS don't do their job, Not the companies.
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