

“ It's bad enough that we have a record trade deficit with China. It is even worse that there is a dangerous quality deficit threatening the safety and health of American consumers. ”

U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer

# CHINA Syndrome

TOXIC TOYS.  
FOULED FOOD.  
POISONED PETS.



**U**SW members know all too well the devastating effects of a broken trade system: the loss of jobs, shattered communities, staggering national deficits.

Now, nearly every edition of the daily newspaper or broadcast of the nightly news reveals there are more side effects that could harm every American — toxic toys, poisoned pet food, tainted toothpaste and an at-risk human food supply are making their way into the United States from China and other places where there are little or no environmental and health regulations.

In early August, Fisher-Price recalled 967,000 plastic preschool toys made in China because their paint contains excessive amounts of lead. The recall covered 83 types of toys including play sets, toy vehicles, figures and musical instruments. Many of the recalled toys are connected to popular children's TV programs including Sesame Street, the acclaimed educational series, and Dora the Explorer, an animated series. Fisher-Price is a subsidiary of Mattel Inc.

In July, media reported that 180 food factories in China that make everything from shrimp to candy were shut down after inspectors found industrial chemicals such as formaldehyde, illegal dyes and wax being used in products.

### Toxic baby bibs

That report came after thousands of pets died from poisoned food, 1.5 million Thomas and Friends toy trains made in China were recalled



because its paint contained lead, and after Chicago area grandmother Marilyn Furer tested her 3-month-old grandson's Chinese-made baby bibs and found they had alarmingly high levels of the poison.

Furer alerted the California-based Center for Environmental Health and further testing led to the recall this spring of tens of thousands of Baby Connection brand bibs sold at Wal-Marts across the nation. Some 60,000 vinyl bibs were recalled in Illinois alone.

"It was incomprehensible to me that bibs with lead in them could be on our marketplace shelves. A deep sense of betrayal overwhelmed me along with great sadness when I thought of babies possibly already damaged by this lead poisoning from baby bibs," Furer said. "Each parent, each grandparent should correctly be outraged, infuriated and picket-ready angry that this was allowed to happen by our government."

Furer says her story should be a wake-up call for those who think a cheap price tag is worth abandoning American manufacturing. She's called on the government to toughen its trade policies and product safety laws to better protect children from dangerous imported items.

### Trade debate intensifies

As consumer pressure to toughen trade and product safety laws mount, the U.S. trade deficit with China hit a record \$233 billion and counting. The deficit has grown at 20 percent or more every year.

Some on Capitol Hill are pushing the Bush administration to take a tougher stance on product safety and China's unfair currency advantage. China's yuan is consistently undervalued, making its exports less costly for American consumers.

U.S. Sen. Charles E. Schumer, chairman of the Joint Economic Committee and a member of the Senate Finance Committee, called for an import czar to oversee consumer protection from Chinese imports.

"It's bad enough that we have a record trade deficit with China. It is even worse that there is a dangerous quality deficit threatening the safety and health of American consumers," Schumer said.

China has stockpiled more than \$1 trillion in U.S. assets as a result of its booming export business. The U.S. economy could be vulnerable if China decides to

dump dollars in the event of a trade war, some lawmakers and economists warn.

### Recalls mount

Meanwhile, the product safety concerns continue. A recent *Chicago Tribune* analysis revealed that since 2004, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission issued 303 recalls for children's products, including 94 toys. Of those recalls, 218, or 72 percent, were products made in China.

While imported food and other products reach record numbers — they've doubled since implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization agreements — the Bush White House has cut the number of Food and Drug



## Toxic Imports

Administration inspectors every year since 2003.

A new report by watchdog *Public Citizen* says the government tests only .6 percent of the food being imported into the United States and that the only effective way to truly protect Americans is to change the nation's trade policies.

Shoddy food safety regulation isn't the only problem. The Administration is proposing closing seven of the FDA's 13 laboratories that do health and safety testing, and has overseen the shrinking of the Consumer Product Safety Commission to about 400 workers, less than half of the agency's staffing levels in 1980.

### Deadly imports

The tainted product scandal first captured the attention of U.S. consumers last year with front-page newspaper reports of dogs and cats dying from pet food made with a toxic additive.

Some 24.3 million tons of Chinese wheat gluten laced with melamine, a chemical used in plastics, were sold to a major pet food maker that supplies North America. The resulting pet deaths led to a massive recall and a public uproar.

## Safeguard Your Children

**U**ntil the government does a better job at protecting consumers' safety, Furer suggest people take the following steps to safeguard babies and children:

- Test for lead. It is a simple finger or toe prick. Lead accumulates in the body and can cause brain damage, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, behavioral problems, stunted growth, impaired hearing, kidney damage and even death. It can be removed but only if you know it is there. Call your doctor and ask if a lead test for your child has been performed. If not, schedule one. Even babies and toddlers should be tested.
- Call, write, e-mail, or forward an informative Web site (go to any search engine and type in "baby bibs and lead") to your contacts, especially to new parents in and out of the United States.
- Buy American-made products when you can and home test soft vinyl plastic baby items. If you don't test — throw them out. Lead is an invisible poison.
- After home testing, should you find lead in any baby or child item, notify the Center for Environmental Health ([www.cehca.org](http://www.cehca.org)) at (510) 594-9864, or (800) 652-0827. They want to know about it.
- Put pressure on your lawmakers to do something about the nation's unfair trade policies that discourage American manufacturing. Let them and the businesses you frequent know that saving a few pennies is not worth endangering our babies and grandbabies!