In what has become an annual tradition, the activist organization Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) has released a list of so-called dangerous toys that parents should avoid buying this holiday season. The list, entitled Trouble in Toyland, reports on over a dozen toys that supposedly go against federal safety standards, with violations ranging from claims of excessive phthalate or lead levels to more reasonable concerns, such as choking hazards.

While it is true that excessive lead exposure can cause damage to the kidneys and nervous system, and some dubious studies have linked phthalates to problems with the reproductive system, ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross puts things in perspective: Unlike toys with minute traces of lead and phthalates, toys that pose a choking hazard to children are actually a real health concern. He continues, While some of the toys PIRG tested may indeed have levels of lead and phthalates that are higher than officially mandated levels, they are still nowhere near high enough to cause any adverse health effects.

Others who believe that PIRG's anti-toy crusade is exaggerated and alarmist point out that toy recalls have been on the decline for years as products have become safer. Bob Adler, one of the five members of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, explains that new rules require independent third-party labs to test all toys for even the currently allowed minuscule levels of lead and phthalates. In response to PIRG's report, he says, "I would feel much more confident today than I would several years ago."