

What You Need To Know About PVC on Playgrounds

Responsibility is a Choice



At BigToys we believe that environmental responsibility comes down to the choices we all make. Many of these are common, every day decisions like "paper or plastic" at the grocery store. In many cases however, these choices are the responsibility of the companies that

we trust to design and produce the things that make up the world around us.

BigToys, Inc. recognizes that the discussion regarding the suitability of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in the manufacture of consumer goods is incomplete. However, in light of conflicting opinions on the subject, we feel it is appropriate to err on the side of safety and discontinue the use of any material that is thought to pose a risk to health and safety when alternatives are available.

For this reason, BigToys eliminated all Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) from our products in September, 2004.

Playgrounds and PVC



Polyvinyl Chloride, commonly known as "PVC", is used to coat various components on the majority of commercial playground equipment sold in the U.S. and Canada. While this semi-resilient coating has many reported positive attributes, there is growing concern about the use of this material that we believe warranted a switch to available alternatives.

* Healthy Building Network

Polyvinyl Chloride is widely recognized to pose risks throughout its life cycle - in its production, its use and its disposal*.

Production: Vinyl Chloride, the primary chemical used in the production of PVC, is a widely recognized carcinogen according to experts at the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).



Use: Phthalates, which are used to soften PVC, can leach out over time and have the potential to cause kidney, liver and reproductive damage to children if they are ingested. As a result, many European countries have already banned phthalates from toys for young children*.

Disposal: Due to the number and type of additives required to make PVC useful, it is cost prohibitive to recycle. Less than half of 1% is recycled annually. The Association of Post Consumer Plastics Recyclers has declared efforts to recycle PVC a failure and subsequently labeled it as a contaminant in 1998*.



A Growing Trend

For the reasons cited above, PVC materials are being rejected by a growing list of internationally recognized institutions ranging from the Honda car company to the giant retailer Wal-Mart, and well known consumer brands such as Nike and Microsoft.



A Serious Concern

When it comes to public playgrounds, perhaps the most serious concern is found when PVC is burned. It is an unfortunate fact that vandals will burn playground equipment that often contains PVC.

Independent testing has proven that burning the PVC coating commonly used on playgrounds results in PCB's and dioxin being created. Regardless of the amount, maintenance workers and children face health risks if they come in contact with these two carcinogenic substances.

According to Bill Walsh of the Healthy Building Network, "There is no safe level of dioxin. Maintenance workers should wear protective gear when handling burned PVC coated playground equipment and when removing the contaminated resilient material beneath the structure. The local health department should be involved in both disposal of the material and in approving the damaged site as safe for future use by the public."

An Avoidable Risk

A variety of alternative materials exist that can be used to manufacture play equipment components as opposed to PVC coated steel. Reinforced recycled plastic, conditioned wood, and textured polyurethane coated steel are just a few examples of materials that perform well in commercial applications.

Additional information on PVC can be obtained from the following resources:

Healthy Building Network

- www.healthybuilding.net

Children's Health Environmental Coalition

- www.healthychild.org

Center for Health, Environment, & Justice

- www.CHEJ.org

Greenpeace International

- www.greenpeace.org

Be Safe

- www.besafenet.com



This playground, which contained PVC coated parts, was intentionally burned by vandals.

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www.bigtoys.com