Border Patrol Warns Against Illegally Imported Toys

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MIAMI (AP) — U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials warned holiday shoppers Monday to stay away from toys that might be dangerous for children or break copyright, patent or trademark laws.

Authorities last year seized more than 1,500 shipments of products that either failed to meet consumer safety standards or violated intellectual property laws, said Harold Woodward, director of the agency's field operations in Miami.

Products intercepted so far this year include toy drums manufactured with small parts that present a choking hazard, yellow toy ducks that contain lead paint, and bright green lighters that look and sound like frogs, but don't have safety mechanisms.

"Obviously, that would be very attractive to a child," Woodward said. "But you open this up, you get the sound effects, you also get a rather significant flame that comes from this."

Officials also singled out counterfeit MP3 players and backpacks, surge protectors with shoddy wiring, and a black toy gun that carries no markings to indicate it is fake.

"Now obviously, it's not functional as a firearm," Woodward said. "However, if in the wrong hands, if in the wrong situation, if this weapon was pointed at any one of us or used in the perpetuation of a crime ... any commonsense individual would say, this is probably a real weapon."

Consumers might find the offending products at businesses such as flea markets, street vendors or smaller, mom & pop stores across the country, according to customs officials. They said the majority of the seized cargo came from China.

"I'm not saying that 'made in China' means it's not a good product," Woodward said. "All I'm saying is we need to be conscious of the fact, we need to be conscious of the fact of what constitutes a safety violation."

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