

# Wal-Mart Cracks Down On Cadmium Jewelry

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — The world's largest retailer revealed Monday that it has started to crack down on the use of the toxic metal cadmium in children's jewelry and other kids' products.

The new policy doesn't affect what's on the shelves of Wal-Mart stores right now.

Instead, children's jewelry and craft-making kits, toys and child-care articles such as bibs and pacifiers manufactured as of April 9 are being tested for cadmium, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. said.

Setting new standards is a voluntary move. Though cadmium can harm bones and kidneys and is a known carcinogen, there are no government regulations on how much of it is allowed in children's jewelry.

Wal-Mart's decision was spurred by investigative reports by The Associated Press that showed high levels of cadmium in some pieces of children's jewelry, including several which Wal-Mart later recalled.

The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission now wants to restrict cadmium in children's jewelry, and several lawmakers at the federal and state levels have proposed tight limits. In California, the state Senate on Monday passed a bill that would effectively ban cadmium in children's jewelry.

Retailers and jewelry firms, many importing their products from Chinese factories, are trying to influence whatever policy changes may ultimately be enacted. To that end, they requested a hearing Monday before agency staff, and it was there that a Wal-Mart representative elaborated the company's thinking.

Wal-Mart's new testing regimen follows cadmium standards set by the European Union, according to Peggy Fowler, the chain's senior director of product safety and regulatory compliance. She told agency staff that Wal-Mart wants U.S. regulators to devise a standard for acceptable cadmium levels as soon as possible — and that in the meantime, the company is working off the European model.

"We really wanted it to be done to affect product this year," Fowler told agency representatives. "We feel like it is our responsibility if we're going to have product on our shelves."

In the two weeks since Wal-Mart's testing went into effect, no product has failed, Fowler said. She did not say who conducted the tests or how many products have been subjected to them.

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Product in stores right now isn't being tested under the new regimen, Fowler said; that type of working backward would be too difficult, she said, a point echoed by a representative of Target Corp.

The European Union is considering whether to toughen its standards, which the Consumer Products Safety Commission has suggested in their current form are not stringent enough.

"Simply to rely on another country's standard is not adequate," said Robert Howell of the agency's Office of Hazard Identification and Reduction. Agency staff must "be able to explain the rationale for the limits that they set."

One key difference between the European tests and those used by CPSC in recalls the agency has conducted since the AP's initial reporting in January is how long a piece of jewelry is bathed in a solution that mimics stomach acid. That test assesses how much cadmium would escape an item if a child swallowed it.

Fowler said longer tests, ranging from 24 to 96 hours, would pose too great a cost burden.

Wal-Mart isn't the only business turning to the European standards. In a separate meeting with agency staff, Michael Gale, executive director of the Fashion Jewelry Trade Association, said the trade group told its members to make and test most of their products according to those regulations.

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