

Indiana Librarian Triggers Toxic-Toy Alert

A serendipitous conversation during a summer-reading promotion between an Indiana children's librarian and a staff member of Bloomington Hospital has triggered the recall of thousands of toys containing hazardous lead levels that libraries nationwide were giving out to children as program incentives. As the word has spread through state health-department alerts, discussion lists, and vendor notices, "every library has been doing the right thing," said Stephanie Holman of Monroe County (Ind.) Public Library's Ellettsville branch. Although MCPL purchased its 300 bendables from Kipp Brothers in Indianapolis, libraries in as many as 41 states had bought them as part of the prepackaged "Paws, Claws, Scales, and Tails" summer reading program created by library-equipment supplier Highsmith, company spokesperson Matt Mulder told the *Springfield (Ohio) News-Sun*.

In an August 8 letter to library participants, Highsmith explained that, even though the bendable toys' painted exteriors passed a lead test on October 14, 2005, the paint registered a lead content of 0.277% in early August.

Federal regulations stipulate that the weight of paint on a toy not exceed 0.06%.

Holman told *American Libraries* that at a July 19 library outreach event, Bloomington Hospital staffer Sheila Evans approached her after noticing the bendable-cat-and-dog toy prizes the library was distributing to attendees. Evans warned that the year before, the hospital had handed out similar items—only to discover that the giveaways contained unacceptable lead levels. As a precaution, Evans gave Holman a swab to test the surface of a sample toy.

The next day Holman found that the toys indeed had a high lead content, and library officials pulled them and notified the state health department. On August 5, the Indiana State Department of Health issued a health alert, quickly followed by warnings from other states.

For Holman, the multiple alerts showed libraries at their finest: increasing lead-poisoning awareness through education. Ironically, the MCPL summer-reading survey results prompted Holman to speculate that libraries may not need such "geegaws" after all: Monroe County children indicated their favorite giveaway was the book given as a concluding grand prize.

Posted August 11, 2006.

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

50 E. Huron Chicago, IL 60611 Call Us Toll Free 1-800-545-2433