



Memo to Santa: Start with safe toy recommendations from our panel of experts

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At the top of every parent's list for Santa this year: safe toys.

More than 21 million toys were recalled this year, ranging from miniature cars that contained lead paint to the popular Aqua Dots, an arts-and-crafts toy that contained a chemical that converts into the "date rape" drug when swallowed. Toy makers affected ranged from the giant Mattel Inc. to smaller companies, such as Kids II Inc., which recalled Baby Einstein Discover & Play Color Blocks.

While there are no guarantees - a toy deemed safe today could be found unsafe tomorrow - we asked a panel of seven toy, kid and environmental experts to list some toys they feel comfortable recommending:

DOLLS: Ed Schmults, CEO of FAO Schwarz, suggests Karito Kids, 21-inch dolls (6 and up) that represent different cultures. The dolls have no phthalates, a chemical used to soften plastics and often found in toys; California has banned toys with more than a trace amount of phthalates. Gurock likes Groovy Girls because the dolls are made out of fabric, which is safer than plastic, wear clothes that are kid-oriented and don't have proportions like a Barbie. Gilliland recommends My Twinn Personalized Doll (ages 3-12) from an eToys sister site.

