

New Law Will Monitor Safety of Handmade Items

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It's a rare day when a woodturner appears on the front page of the *New York Times* business section, but there he was on October 31, a Maine craftsman standing at his lathe, under the headline, "Burden of Safety Law Imperils Small Toymakers."

The story was prompted by the mandates imposed by a federal law—the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act—passed in 2008 and intended to ensure that lead paint and other potentially harmful substances are not used in the manufacture of a wide variety of consumer products. Targets of the law include imports from Asia and Latin America, most by large toy and other consumer merchandisers.

Resources for Beginning Woodturners

Significant and helpful resources for beginning woodturners are available through the AAW at reasonable prices. Consider acquiring project books, DVDs, or a few back issues of *American Woodturner* to help you learn more about woodturning and the woodturning community. Simply visit the AAW's website, woodturner.org, and click on Shopping, then AAW Products; or send an email to inquiries@woodturner.org; or call 615-484-9094. Our staff is eager to help you succeed, enjoy, and be safe with all of your woodturning endeavors.

The unintended consequence may be that small craft businesses and hobbyists, as makers of handmade items, will need to prove—through elaborate and expensive tests at authorized laboratories—that their products are nontoxic and safe for children under the age of 12. The new regulations are scheduled to be implemented in February 2010.

For woodturners, that could cover a host of craft and gift items: pens, tops, baby rattles, buttons, ornaments, jewelry, beads, key rings, bottle stoppers, tableware—from scoops to honey dippers to salad bowls and serving trays—and an array of objects that the law mentions only as "small parts."

The good news is that turnings made entirely of untreated wood (without paint, surface coatings, or hardware) may be sold or given away without needing certification that they have passed testing for lead or other dangerous substances. However, the law states that any product that has an applied finish or uses certain glues or additives is subject to testing. (Imported or exotic woods are not specified, although many individuals are allergic to some species.)

Who is covered? According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the law includes "all manufacturers and importers—large and small, domestic and foreign. All businesses, including handmade toy and apparel makers, crafters, those making charitable donations, and other small business must take appropriate steps to be sure that their products conform to all aspects of the law and safety standards, including the new lead

content and phthalates limits and mandatory toy standards."

In response, a number of small shops and individual craftspersons are organizing to change the law, which clearly was intended to protect consumers from manufacturing practices that produce imported and mass-produced items for resale by large retailers such as Target and Walmart. Some of these imports have been tainted with lead paint and other harmful substances.

William John Woods, the toymaker from Maine who was featured in the *Times* article, estimates it would cost him around \$30,000 to perform tests on the eighty different items he makes, which include wooden cars, boats, helicopters, and rattles. His toys are made of maple, walnut, and cherry and finished with walnut oil and beeswax from a local apiary.

Woods and fellow members of the Handmade Toy Alliance are pressing Congress and the CPSC to exempt small craft shops and handicrafters from the law's provisions.

For further information, consult the following resources:

- The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (cpsc.gov) has published a twenty-four-page booklet about the new law entitled *Handbook for Resale Stores and Product Resellers* to help sellers understand the new law and existing regulations. The document can be downloaded from the Commission website at cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs//thrift/thrguid.pdf.
- The Handmade Toy Alliance website, handmadetoyalliance.org, describes efforts the organization is making to change the new law. ■