

Age grading of toys...



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Q&A with Malcolm Horner, Toy Technical Consultant at Bureau Veritas Consumer Products Services

Q: As a manufacturer, do I have to age grade my toy?

A: Yes. Article 18 of the Toy Safety Directive requires manufacturers to carry out a safety assessment: "Manufacturers shall, before placing a toy on the market, carry out a safety assessment which is an analysis of the chemical, physical, mechanical, electrical, flammability, hygiene and radioactivity hazards that the toy may present, and an assessment of the potential exposure to them". It is not possible to carry out a safety assessment without knowing to which age group your toy is intended for. Also, the Toy Safety Directive requires that when applicable, toys are marked with the minimum or maximum age of the user and when appropriate, the abilities of the user and the maximum and/or minimum weight of the user must also be indicated.

Q: How do I go about age grading my toy if I'm a manufacturer?

A: There is a CEN report on age grade classification of toys. Whilst this goes some way towards assisting with age grading, the United States CPSC Age Determination Guidelines are generally considered to be more comprehensive. In addition, a number of European Commission Guidance Documents for toys also help with age grading.

There are several important cut-offs regarding age grading that need to be taken into account:

- **Toys for children under 10 months**
- **Toys for children under 18 months**
- **Toys for children under 36 months**
- **Toys for children under 6 years**

Age grading is the responsibility of the manufacturer (as a reminder, a retailer or importer who markets own-label toys is considered as being the manufacturer); however your laboratory partner may be able to advise you if you are unsure.

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Q: Does the age grade affect the testing that needs to be carried out on a toy?

A: Yes. It is very important to age grade the toy first and then test it accordingly and not the other way round! As an example, you cannot carry out a test on a toy, realise it has small parts (hence not suitable for under 36 month old children) and then decide to age grade the toy for children over 36 months if the toy is obviously intended for children under 3 years.

In addition, if a toy is age graded for children under 10 months, then it would have to be tested as a toy for children who cannot sit up unaided.

Age grading for chemistry sets and other chemical toys is also important.

Q: Do I have any obligations to indicate the age grade on my packaging?

A: Yes and no. If a toy is not suitable for a child under 3 years old, it must carry an appropriate warning statement (visible at the point of sale) together with an indication of the restriction, e.g. "Warning. Not suitable for children under 36 months - small parts, choking hazard".

The warning must be in a language suitable to the country in which the toy is supplied. The "Not suitable for children under 36 months" sentence can be replaced by or accompanied with this well-recognised symbol. (The word "Warning" must still be used and must precede the symbol).

However, age grading (as opposed to an age warning) is more of a voluntary statement provided by the manufacturer to assist the parent in purchasing the correct toy for the appropriate age of the child, in terms of the child's abilities and development. Unless this needs

to take the form of the aforementioned warning, or needs to be present for other safety reasons (e.g. maximum or minimum age/weight of the user), age grading can be provided on the packaging at the manufacturer's discretion.

