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## **MEDIA BRIEFING NOTES**

### **Toys & Noise**

The Toy Retailers Association has been asked to comment on the latest toy safety concerns voiced in the press. Research has been published today which was commissioned by Deafness Research UK, a charity campaigning on hearing loss issues. It was carried out by Dr. Brad Backus, a research fellow at UCL's Ear Institute and he claims that "14 out of 15 noise-emitting toys tested could damage child's hearing".

All responsible Toy Retailers in the UK such as those in our Lion Mark scheme sell CE Marked toys which are tested by, or on behalf of, the manufacturers or importers and must comply with the European harmonised standards.

Testing is quite a technical matter. We are concerned that a distorted view is being given by reports of this research as the EU standard requires that measurements are made at various distances dependent on the toy. In most cases, 50cm is required and 2.5cm for close to the ear toys (such as toy telephones). Therefore the results reported are inflated because only 25cms has been used despite the guidance in the standard.

Noise in toys was a very contentious issue when requirements were introduced into the EU safety standard for toys some years ago. European Research reported by UCL's Ear Institute then confirmed that "there was very little evidence that the noise produced by toys was a significant contributor to hearing loss in children". Apart from very young babies, there is no significant evidence to suggest that infants and children are more susceptible than adults to noise-induced hearing loss which take considerable time.

Exposure to noise from toys remains low in comparison with other sources of noise in the child's environment. For example much road noise is well above 85dB(A) for adults while a child in a push chair is likely to be exposed to higher levels still. The underground sustains levels of around 90 dB(A) while football crowds and other

public events are noisier still. Workplaces only normally begin to introduce controls when a 85dB(A) level is continuous.

Nevertheless, limits were introduced and toy companies are effectively required to comply with the harmonised requirements. On the basis of the evidence introduced by the press reports today it is far from clear that more than a very small proportion of toys fail to comply with this strict precautionary standard.

Parental supervision is a key part of toy selection and all play and they are the most sensible and concerned partners in everyone's endeavour to ensure our children's safety. As Deafness Research UK themselves state "damage to hearing is not caused by sound levels alone. To prevent damage it is important to take into account both the loudness of the sounds and the amount of time the child is exposed to them."

**Notes for Editors:**

1. The TRA has around 400 members accounting for 75% of toy retailers, while the British Toy and Hobby Association represents over 150 members accounting for over 90% of toys sold in the UK market.
2. The Dti commissioned extensive research on this issue in the late 90's which guided the current codes. ISVR Consultancy Services Report 5403 R02 / August 1997
3. Relevant codes are based on EN 71-1:1998 Safety of toys – Part 1: Mechanical and physical properties

**For further information please contact:**

Toy Retailers Association (formerly the BATR)  
Gainsborough Waterfront Enterprise Centre  
Lea Road  
GAINSBOROUGH  
DN21 1LX

Secretary: Derek Markie

Tel 08707 537437

Fax 08707 060042

Email [enquiries@toyretailersassociation.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@toyretailersassociation.co.uk)

Website [www.toyretailersassociation.co.uk](http://www.toyretailersassociation.co.uk)