

Wal-Mart pulls Miley Cyrus jewelry over cadmium

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In this photo taken May 3, 2010, Ashland University chemistry professor Jeff Weidenhamer displays a hoop earring in his laboratory at the university in Ashland, Ohio, Monday, May 3, 2010. The earring and a variety of other small charm bracelet charms and pendants that Weidenhamer has tested, have shown to contain the metal cadmium. (AP Photo/Phil Long)

(AP) -- Wal-Mart said Wednesday it is pulling an entire line of Miley Cyrus-brand necklaces and bracelets from its shelves after tests performed for The Associated Press found the jewelry contained high levels of the toxic metal cadmium.

In a statement issued three hours after AP's initial report of its findings, Wal-Mart said it would remove the [jewelry](#), made exclusively for the world's largest retailer, while it investigates. The company issued the

statement along with Cyrus and Max Azria, the designer who developed the jewelry for the 17-year-old "Hannah Montana" star.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. had learned of cadmium in the Miley Cyrus jewelry, as well as in an unrelated line of bracelet charms, back in February, based on an earlier round of testing conducted at AP's request, but had continued selling the items. It said as recently as last month that it would be too difficult to test products already on its shelves.

In its statement, Wal-Mart did not say whether it would also remove the bracelet charms.

Exactly how many of the items have been sold was unclear. The charms - also available exclusively at [Walmart](#) stores - were sold under the name "Fashion Accessories," though Wal-Mart has not said when they began appearing on shelves. The Miley Cyrus jewelry hit stores in December.

Long-term exposure to cadmium can lead to bone softening and [kidney failure](#). It is also a known [carcinogen](#), and research suggests that it can, like lead, hinder [brain development](#) in the very young.

Cadmium in jewelry is not known to be dangerous if the items are simply worn. Concerns come when youngsters bite or suck on the jewelry, as many children are apt to do.

Wal-Mart said that while the jewelry is not intended for children, "it is possible that a few younger consumers may seek it out in stores."

"We are removing all of the jewelry from sale while we investigate its compliance with our children's jewelry standard," Wal-Mart said.

That was a reference to a policy Wal-Mart voluntarily implemented last month, under which suppliers are required to prove their products

contain little cadmium, or else Wal-Mart would not accept them.

The company's policy of not checking products already on the shelves appears to have changed: In its statement, Wal-Mart said it reviewed children's jewelry and pulled "the few products that did not" comply with its new testing regimen.

Cadmium in children's jewelry became a public concern in January when the AP published the results of an investigation that showed items at Walmarts and other large chains were as much as 91 percent of the toxic metal by weight.

That testing was conducted by chemistry professor Jeff Weidenhamer of Ashland University in Ohio. In February, Weidenhamer was asked to provide to Wal-Mart headquarters detailed results of tests on items he bought at Walmarts as part of testing he had done for AP. Those items included 10 of the charms and three from the Cyrus line.

To judge the continued availability of pieces that Wal-Mart has known were contaminated, AP dispatched reporters throughout the country last month to buy any of the 13 items they could find. The packaging said they were made in China; all were bought for \$6 or less.

All but one of the 13 were on store shelves in the eight states where AP reporters looked. Contrary to Wal-Mart's statement Wednesday, which said the Miley Cyrus jewelry was sold in the women's apparel section, AP reporters found the items either in the jewelry section or discount bins.

The items were then tested by Weidenhamer. Of 61 samples, 59 contained at least 5 percent cadmium by weight, with 53 of those measuring 10 percent or higher.

Weidenhamer's prior research has shown that the testing method he used - an X-ray gun that can roughly tell the amount of cadmium in an item - typically underestimates how much is present.

Representatives of the jewelry industry have argued that the presence of cadmium, even at high levels, is not by itself proof that an item is dangerous. The important thing, they say, is how much can escape if the item is sucked, bitten or swallowed.

Lab testing conducted by Weidenhamer at AP's request showed that several items easily shed the metal when exposed to a mixture that simulated human stomach acid.

The day after AP's original report, Wal-Mart said it was pulling two of the highlighted items - pendants with themes from the Disney movie "The Princess and the Frog." Within three weeks, the chain had agreed to recall all the pendants already sold.

Since then, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has issued two more recalls, for charm bracelets sold at the international jewelry chain Claire's and at a Dollar N More store. Last week, the agency's spokesman said there will be more recalls.

While AP's January investigation focused on jewelry clearly intended for children, the items tested for AP this time were labeled "not intended for children under 14 years." That is an important legal distinction: Under current law, children's items are defined as for kids 12 and under, and children's products are subject to regulations that others are not.

For reasons that are not fully understood, girls ages 6 to 11 - an age range that includes many fans of Cyrus' "Hannah Montana" TV show, movies and CDs - appear to be more at risk from cadmium.

Data from a major national study found that girls of that age absorb more cadmium than other children or adults, according to Bruce A. Fowler, a toxicologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The increased absorption could be because those girls typically have iron deficiency and their bodies grab on to cadmium as a substitute, Fowler said, or it could be because they encounter more of the metal in objects such as jewelry.

The importer of the bracelet charms, Cousin Corp. of America, said that earlier this year, it persuaded one of the Chinese factories with which it works to stop using cadmium. The cadmium-heavy jewelry Weidenhamer tested was produced in 2008 and 2009 at the problem factory, said Roy Gudgeon, vice president of merchandise at Florida-based Cousin.

"Our intention as a company is to never willingly cause harm to a child," he said.

Federal regulators' own research says that kids start becoming interested in making their own jewelry around ages 6 to 8. As for products featuring Cyrus, her fans include teenagers, tweens, even kindergartners.

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