

Feds say glasses with lead are kids' products

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This Sept. 9, 2010 photo shows an Olympus Innov-X Delta Handheld XRF Analyzer testing glassware decorated with a Ronald McDonald character for cadmium, lead and other toxic elements in Los Angeles. The device is used for the analysis of environmental, geological, biological, industrial and other samples. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)

(AP) -- It didn't take long for federal regulators to put new rules on what makes a consumer product a "children's product" to a very public test.

Last month, the U.S. [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) published a detailed explanation of the distinction between the two - a distinction that makes a big difference because it can trigger a range of strict rules.

On Monday, commission staff declared that sets of [drinking glasses](#) depicting comic book and movie characters were indeed children's products, undercutting the position of the importer of the glasses, which

said they were marketed to adults.

That decision meant the glasses - which featured images of superheroes including Superman and Wonder Woman, and characters from "The Wizard of Oz" such as Dorothy and the Tin Man - couldn't have more than 0.03 percent lead. Lab testing commissioned by The Associated Press showed they contained up to 1,000 times that limit in their colored designs.

If they were not children's products, there would be no limit.

As it turns out, they are. Even as the company that imported the glasses insisted they were adult collectibles, it announced it would voluntarily recall them. Vandor LLC of Utah said it would work with the CPSC to remove from circulation the approximately 72,000 glasses already sold.

The agency, meanwhile, was collecting samples of other glasses that may be deemed children's products cited in an ongoing Associated Press investigation into dangerous metals in children's merchandise. The agency's own inquiry would extend beyond the superhero and Oz glasses to include others cited by AP "that have decorations that children would be attracted to," said spokesman Scott Wolfson.

In all, about 160,000 glasses have been recalled by two companies [since the AP disclosed Sunday](#) that its laboratory tests showed colored designs in a range of glasses contain high levels of lead or were made in such a way that lead or [cadmium](#) could escape and contaminate the hands of someone handling them.

Federal regulators have worried that toxic metals rubbing onto children's hands can get into their mouths.

The concern is long-term, not immediate. While the superhero and Oz

glasses had high levels of lead in their designs, they did not release enough to hurt anyone. The issue is whether the glasses, made in China and purchased at the Warner Bros. Studios store in Burbank, Calif., comply with federal limits on lead in children's products.

Soon after agency spokesman Wolfson said Monday that the CPSC considers the glasses children's products, Warner Bros. said it would stop selling them. Then Vandor said it would pull them from the broader market.

Both Vandor and Warner Bros. said in separate statements that their decisions were made in "an abundance of caution." Vandor said the "themed glassware falls within legal limits for lead and cadmium content," according to its own tests.

Last week, while commenting on AP's test results, Warner Bros. said, "It is generally understood that the primary consumer for these products is an adult, usually a collector." On the entertainment giant's website, however, the superhero glasses were sold alongside a lunch box and children's T-shirts with superhero images. By late Tuesday, the glasses were no longer available.

Vandor CEO Tom Russo said his company would "work with the CPSC to develop a recall plan." Details of the recall will be posted on <http://www.vandorproducts.com> when available, the company said.

In addition to the Vandor recall, the Coca-Cola Co. voluntarily recalled 88,000 glasses that shed cadmium during AP testing that recreated what could escape from decorations during regular handling. The glasses came in sets of four and were designed to look like cans of Coke, Diet Coke, Coke Zero and Sprite.

Coke said late Sunday that the all-red Coke glass prompted the recall

"for quality reasons," not because of a "safety hazard or health threat." A spokeswoman would not elaborate. The company said it retested the entire set after AP shared its results last week, and saw no problem with the other three designs.

The manufacturer of the Coke glasses, French-owned Arc International, emphasized in a statement attributed to CEO Fred Dohn that the glasses "are safe for their intended use and meet all applicable regulatory standards for cadmium."

The latest AP testing was prompted by a recall this summer by McDonald's of 12 million glasses because cadmium escaped from designs depicting four characters in the latest "Shrek" movie.

Arc International officials said in June that the "Shrek" glasses, made at its New Jersey plant, were manufactured according to standard industry practices, which includes the routine use of cadmium to create red and similar colors.

To gauge how widespread the use of lead and cadmium has been - and whether their use poses potential health hazards - AP bought 13 new glasses, plus 22 old glasses dating from the late 1960s to 2007.

Those glasses were subjected to a battery of tests, which looked at whether glasses would shed lead or cadmium from their decorations during normal handling, as well as how much of the toxic metals those decorations contain.

AP's testing showed that while the Chinese manufacturer of the superhero and Oz glasses loaded the decorations with lead, very little came out of the decorations during testing. Overall, 25 of the 35 glasses tested safe - their decorations shed very low or no detectable amounts of lead or cadmium.

The other 10 glasses shed small but notable levels of lead, cadmium or, in two cases, both.

Lead has long been known to damage young brains; recent research suggests cadmium can do the same. Cadmium also can harm kidneys and bones, especially if it accumulates over time.

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