

# News

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## **Sight & Hearing Association releases annual noisy toys list** *12 of 15 toys tested are louder than a motorcycle*

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Twelve of the 15 toys tested this year for Sight & Hearing Association’s annual Noisy Toys List sounded off louder than 100 decibels (dBA). The time it takes to risk hearing damage at that level? 15 minutes.

For the ninth year, the nonprofit organization and researchers from the University of Minnesota tested toys — taken right off retailers’ shelves — for potentially dangerous sound levels. All of the toys measured over 90 dB directly at the speaker of the toy. And 11 of the 15 are meant for children three years or younger.

The top offender on this year’s list, SRM Entertainment’s Power Gear Neo Fazer, blared at 116 dB — loud enough to risk hearing damage in less than 30 seconds. Three books meant for 18-month-olds — “The Wiggles Wiggly Jukebox,” “The Wiggles Wiggly Songs” and “Help Along Sing a Song” — measured at 114 dB, 113 dB and 112 dB, respectively. All of those books are loud enough to risk hearing damage in less than one minute.

Exposure to noise levels above 85 dB for eight hours is the federal threshold for hearing protection. Levels above 90 dB can cause permanent hearing loss with relatively short exposure.

Because of a child’s shorter arm span, toys are often potentially more dangerous to hearing because children hold them closer to their ears. In the Sight & Hearing Association study, the toys were repeatedly tested at distances simulating how a child might hold the toy, directly near the ear (0 inches) and at arm’s length (10 inches). A sound-proof acoustic chamber was used to ensure accurate measurements.

Until 2004, there were no regulations in the United States regarding the loudness of toys. An acoustics standard (ASTM F963), adopted and revised in March 2004 by the ASTM International, states that a hand-held, table-top or crib toy cannot exceed 90 dB 25 cm (approx. 10 in.) from the surface of the toy. Compliance with the standard is voluntary.

Directly at the speaker of the toy, all of the toys tested this year measured louder than 90 dB. At 10 inches

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## Noisy toys

### Page 2 of 2

from the toy's surface, four of the toys measured louder than 90 dB: the Rock Star Classic Electronic Guitar (97 dB), The Home Depot Light & Sound Wrench (94 dB), the Power Gear Neo Fazer (91 dB), and the Power Gear Max Sound Fazer (90 dB).

Seth Janus, M.D., an otolaryngologist at the University of Minnesota, tested the toys.

"I was very surprised how loud the toys were up close," he said, "but they dropped down to reasonable levels when testing at 10 inches."

Whenever possible, he says, a parent should try to make sure their child does not hold a toy up to their ears.

Unlike with choking hazards and other injuries, there are no injury statistics on toys and hearing loss. That's because noise-induced hearing loss is nearly impossible to track its origination.

"Noise-induced hearing loss is cumulative," explains Julee Sylvester, Sight & Hearing Association spokesperson. "It doesn't typically happen from one event; it gradually happens over time. That's why it's important to start protecting hearing at a young age."

To protect a child's hearing, the Sight & Hearing Association offers the following tips:

- Listen to a toy before you buy it. If it sounds loud to you, it's too loud for your child.
- Report a loud toy. Call the Consumer Product Safety Commission or the Sight & Hearing Association.
- Put masking or packing tape over the speaker on the toy. This will help reduce the volume.

The Minnesota-based Sight & Hearing Association, founded in 1939, is dedicated to preventing vision and hearing loss through education, screening and research.

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