

The Buckyball Stops Here

By Reg P. Wydeven
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As an attorney, a big part of my day is spent on the phone. Many times I'm speaking with clients, but sometimes I'm trying to reach someone at the IRS, an insurance company or another law firm. So once in a while, I get stuck on hold.

While waiting, I try to name Muzak songs in as few notes as possible. I also attempt to catch up on recording my time for the day. Once in a while I'll surf the web to check out spoilers for next year's Star Trek movie.

One of my buddies at work will play solitaire on his computer while on hold. Another takes advantage of his cordless headset to practice his putting. My buddy, Scott, though, makes all kinds of interesting creations with his Buckyballs.

Buckyballs are small, magnetic ball bearings that can be contorted into any configuration imaginable. Maxfield & Oberton, the manufacturer of Buckyballs and Buckycubes, have sold more than 2 million of their popular office toys. Buckyballs are marketed to adults as a cure for workplace boredom or as stress relievers, but Maxfield & Oberton are the ones getting stressed.

After longtime pressure from the federal government, the company has elected to discontinue Buckyballs. Maxfield & Oberton announced the decision on their website by posting a statement that read, "Due to baseless and relentless legal badgering by a certain four letter government agency, it's time to bid a fond farewell to the world's most popular adult desk toys, Buckyballs and Buckycubes. That's right: We're sad to say that Balls & Cubes have a one-way ticket to the Land-of-Awesome-Stuff-You-Should-Have-Bought-When-You-Had-the-Chance."

The agency the company is referring to is the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, whose job it is to ensure the products we buy are safe. The CPSC started tightening the screws on Buckyballs after an estimated 1,700 people ingested them and were hospitalized in the past three years. The CPSC's investigation led to the agency filing a lawsuit in July against Maxfield & Oberton. The lawsuit alleges that Buckyballs are "hazardous" because the strong magnets "contain a defect in the design, packaging, warnings and instructions, which pose a substantial risk of injury to the public."

The CPSC demanded that Buckyballs be recalled immediately, along with several other high-power magnetic toys manufactured by other companies, for safety reasons. The agency released a statement saying, "In response to a request from CPSC staff, a number of retailers have voluntarily agreed to stop selling Buckyballs, Buckycubes and similar products manufactured by other companies. CPSC staff called upon these retailers to cease distribution of high-powered, manipulative magnetic products after dozens of young children and teenagers swallowed multiple magnets, which connected inside their gastrointestinal tracts and caused internal injuries requiring surgery. The online marketplace, eBay, has also agreed to implement steps to remove listings by sellers for these items."

Maybe I'll get Scott some Silly Putty just to be safe.