

# Safety Dance

**By Reg P. Wydeven  
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Last week I wrote about McDonalds having Star Wars toys in their Happy Meals to celebrate the release of the movie franchise's latest installment, 'The Clone Wars.' In addition, Hasbro has released a whole slew of new action figures. The figures are extremely cool, accurate miniature representations of the characters from the movie.

While awesome, these action figures are manufactured in China, so they contain lots of paint and small pieces, which can be potentially unsafe for very young children. Even though I'm confident the action figures are safe, thanks to a new law signed into effect by President Bush last week, over the next few years I should be very comfortable about the safety of toys.

The new law gives more funding and teeth to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Insiders say the bill enacts the biggest overhaul to the CPSC since it was established in the 1970s. The timing couldn't be better, as various consumer watchdog groups report that product recalls are up 22% in 2008 compared to the same time last year. In addition, the U.S. imports more products from more nations today than in any point in history.

Starting in 2010, the CPSC will receive increased funding over a five-year period. In 2008, the agency received \$80 million. This number will grow to \$118 million in 2010 and escalate to \$136 million by 2015. With the new funds, the CPSC will create a public database for consumer complaints about product safety.

Under the act, the CPSC is authorized to inspect manufacturers' proprietary laboratories to gauge safety. Further, to encourage full disclosure of potential hazards, the law provides whistleblower protections for employees of manufacturers, private labelers, retailers and distributors who warn of problems.

The most protections are for children. The law allows the CPSC to require third-party testing of certain products for kids and make new safety rules for toys. Finally, the law bans children's products containing more than trace amounts of lead and toys or child-care articles containing miniscule amounts of certain phthalates, a plastic additive used to increase flexibility.

Now, Star Wars action figures won't only be cool, they will undoubtedly be safe.