

# News

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## **Toys sound off in dangerous zone** *Sight & Hearing Association releases annual noisy toys list*

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Nineteen of the 24 toys tested by the Sight & Hearing Association for noise levels this holiday shopping season sounded out louder than 100 dB — similar to the blare of a chainsaw. At that level, a child's hearing could be damaged in less than 15 minutes.

For the 14th year, the nonprofit organization and researchers from the University of Minnesota tested a variety of toys — taken right off the shelves of local toy stores — for potentially dangerous noise levels. This year's top offender, Disney Cars 2 Shake 'N Go Finn McMissile, blared at 124 decibels (dB) directly at the speaker of the toy. According to National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) standards, that level leads to a risk of hearing damage almost instantly.

"It was surprising how loud many of these toys were," confirmed David Montag, M.D., an otolaryngologist and resident at the University of Minnesota's department of otolaryngology who tested the toys. "Noises greater than 85 dB have been shown to cause hearing loss. Many of the tested toys exceed this even when tested 10 inches from the speaker."

In fact, sounds that are 85 dB or louder can permanently damage your ears. The louder the sound, the less time it takes to cause damage. For example, a sound at 85 dB may take as long as eight hours to cause permanent damage, while a sound at 100 dB can start damaging the inner ear's hair cells after only 15 minutes of listening. According to NIOSH, part of the Centers for Disease Control, the permissible exposure time (the amount of time you should listen) is cut in half with every 3 decibels over 85 dB.

Until 2009, toy manufacturers were not required to follow any guidelines regarding the sound level of toys. Today, all toys must meet the acoustic standard set by the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM) (ASTM F963-08), which states the sound-pressure level produced by all other toys except close-to-the-ear toys shall not exceed 85 dB 50 cm from the surface of the toy.

However, most kids play with toys by holding them or sitting right next to them, not at 50 cm away, which is just over 1.5 feet. As it has done for the past 14 years, SHA tests toys at distances simulating how a child might hold the toy — directly near the ear (0 inches) and at arm's length (10 inches).

"We do this test two ways because we want to know exactly what these toys are capable of producing in a real play situation," explains Julee Sylvester, SHA spokesperson. "In other words, how loud can these toys get?"

**-more-**

## Noisy toys

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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 at 800/638-2772 or the Sight & Hearing Association at 800/992-0424, or contact us by e-mail at [ReportAToy@sightandhearing.org](mailto:ReportAToy@sightandhearing.org).
- Put masking or packing tape over the speaker on the toy. This will help reduce the volume.
- Buy toys with volume controls.

"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."

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

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