September 11, 2007

In Defense of Mattel

**By** [**BOB ECKERT**](http://online.wsj.com/search/term.html?KEYWORDS=BOB+ECKERT+&bylinesearch=true)

What is going on at Mattel? I've heard this question many times over the course of the past few weeks as we've conducted three voluntary recalls of products, due to impermissible levels of lead in paint. I've heard from concerned parents, employees, my neighbors, former colleagues and even my own children. I think just about everyone knows we've had recalls. That's good. It means we have achieved our main goal of successfully communicating widely and openly with our many constituents.

Media coverage of the recalls, overall, has been helpful in spreading the news to consumers. Unfortunately, in some cases, opinions have been attributed to me that I've never held, let alone expressed. More seriously, the character of Mattel has been maligned. We've even been accused of being "unapologetic" by the very same newspaper in which we ran full-page ads apologizing. I apologize again. A hit towards the newspaper?

I want to make clear where I stand and look forward to doing the same before Congress. I fully support the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the vital work that it does. We have worked closely and respectfully with the CPSC throughout this difficult period, and I applaud its prompt actions and professionalism.

As a father of four, I am intimately aware of the expectations of parents -- they want safe toys, and they want assurances that those toys have been tested to make sure that they're safe. Currently, [lead paint](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118945976718023000.html) is topmost on parents' minds. I want parents to be assured that we are taking action. Makes it personal

To complement our many existing safeguards, we have implemented a strengthened three-stage safety check system to prevent lead in paint. First, we require that only paint from certified suppliers be used and that every single batch of paint at every single vendor be tested. If it doesn't pass, it doesn't get used. No exceptions. Second, we have significantly increased testing and unannounced inspections at every stage of the [production process](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118945976718023000.html). Finally, finished toys from every production run must be tested for lead to ensure they are safe before reaching store shelves.

Mattel is conducting a thorough investigation, combing through our products to ensure that we identify and recall any product affected by lead paint, no matter how tiny the area. The level of detail in our findings is indicative of how intensively we are searching. For example, we identified lead paint on the headlights of a three-inch train car -- and we recalled it. If there is a needle in the proverbial haystack, we aim to find it. I encourage other companies to do the same.

Our toys are overwhelmingly safe. To date, our lead-related recalls of toys produced in the past 12 months represent less than half of 1% of our production. I'd rather the number was zero.

As we continue our [lead paint testing](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118945976718023000.html), it's possible that we could find more items that have parts that may not meet our specifications. Obviously, I hope we don't find anything else. But if we find any issue, no matter how small, we will work closely with authorities world-wide to inform consumers quickly and take prompt corrective action.

There has been quite a lot of talk about toy testing in past weeks. I also want to talk about this test of Mattel as an organization, and what people can expect from us moving forward. It is my sincere pledge that we will face this challenge with integrity and reaffirm that we will do the right thing. We will embrace this test of our company and the opportunity to become better.

When I was a young man growing up in suburban Chicago, my father encouraged me to earn his trust through my actions rather than just talk about what I was going to do. Today, I tell my children "deeds, not words." Makes it personal

And it is on this principle that Mattel will move forward. We will earn back your trust with our deeds, not just with our words.

***Mr. Eckert is chairman and CEO of Mattel.***