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## LEAD IN JEWELRY AND OTHER PRODUCTS SOLD IN CAPITOL GIFT SHOPS

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PREPARED FOR  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the request of Rep. Henry A. Waxman and Sen. Barack Obama, the Special Investigations Division tested inexpensive jewelry and other products used by children that are sold in gift shops in the Capitol and House and Senate office buildings. The testing showed that seven products had high lead levels, including some products that contained a potentially lethal dose of lead if ingested by a child. The products with high lead levels included a silver-plated bracelet, an eagle pendant, a gold-plated bracelet, a Capitol charm, and a souvenir spoon.

### I. BACKGROUND

Over 400,000 American children are estimated to have elevated blood lead levels, which can lead to multiple neurological and physical disorders. Dangerous – even fatal – blood lead levels may result from a single acute exposure to lead or repeated exposure to smaller doses. Regardless of the route of exposure, there is no known safe blood lead level for young children.

Children’s jewelry is one source of lead exposure among children. In the past year alone, over eight million pieces of children’s jewelry were recalled due to dangerously high levels of lead. Earlier this year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that a four-year-old child died from lead poisoning after swallowing a metallic charm containing over 90% lead that was issued as a free gift with the purchase of Reebok shoes.<sup>1</sup> In a similar case in 2004, CDC reported that a child became seriously ill after swallowing a piece of metallic jewelry containing 38% lead.<sup>2</sup>

Representative Waxman and Senator Obama have repeatedly called on the Bush Administration to address this hazard by banning the use of lead in children’s products.<sup>3</sup> To date, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the federal authority responsible for protecting consumers from hazardous products, has rejected these requests. Instead, CPSC has sought to address the threat of lead in children’s products through reliance on voluntary industry guidelines. On December 4, the scientific staff at CPSC recommended that the CPSC adopt a mandatory limit on lead in children’s jewelry.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Death of a Child After Ingestion of a Metallic Charm — Minnesota, 2006, MMWR (Mar. 31, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Brief Report: Lead Poisoning from Ingestion of a Toy Necklace — Oregon, 2003, MMWR (June 18, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Letter from Rep. Henry A. Waxman and Sen. Barack Obama to the Honorable Hal Stratton (Mar. 23, 2006); Letter from Rep. Henry A. Waxman to the Honorable Hal Stratton (Jan. 13, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Consumer Product Safety Commission, Briefing Package for Petition Requesting Ban of Lead in Toy Jewelry (Petition No. HP 06-1) (Dec. 4, 2006) (online at <http://www.cpsc.gov/LIBRARY/FOIA/FOIA07/BRIEF/LeadToyJewelry.pdf>).

## II. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Within the U.S. Capitol, four gift shops sell a variety of charms, pins, necklaces, dishware, and other Capitol-themed products. One gift shop is located in the Crypt of the Capitol; one is located on the Senate side of the Capitol; one is located in the Longworth House Office Building; and one is located in the Dirksen Senate Office Building. These gift shops are visited by thousands of tourists, interns, and staff every year, including many who purchase items for children. A typical display of inexpensive jewelry is pictured below.

To evaluate the safety of the jewelry and other products potentially used by children that are sold in the Capitol gift shops, Representative Waxman and Senator Obama asked the Special Investigations Division to test items purchased from each of the four gift shops for their lead content. The items selected for testing were chosen for their likelihood to end up in the hands (and mouths) of children. Many of the items were small enough to be ingested by a child, while others might be sucked on or “mouthed” by children.



**Jewelry on Display in a U.S. Capitol Gift Shop**

In total, 13 items were selected for testing. These products were sent to an independent laboratory, Penniman & Browne, Inc., to be tested for their total lead content. Penniman & Browne used test protocols established by the Consumer Product Safety Commission.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Consumer Product Safety Commission, Interim Enforcement Policy for Children’s Metal Jewelry Containing Lead – 2/3/2005, (Feb. 3, 2005).

For purposes of this report, a product was considered to contain excessive levels of lead if the product's lead content exceeded 600 parts per million (ppm). In 1978, CPSC banned the use of paint containing lead in excess of this level. The states of California and Illinois recently adopted this standard for lead in jewelry, banning children's jewelry that contains lead in excess of 600 ppm.<sup>6</sup> This is also the standard endorsed by the CPSC staff on December 4.<sup>7</sup>

### III. FINDINGS

Of the 13 items from the Capitol gift shops tested for their lead content, seven items – more than half – contained excessive levels of lead.

The highest level of lead was found in a silver-plated bracelet purchased for \$4.95 at the gift shop in the Crypt of the Capitol. This bracelet had a lead content of 384,594 ppm, which is over 640 times greater than the 600 ppm standard set by California and Illinois. An eagle pendant purchased for \$7.95 at the same gift shop in the Capitol had a lead content of 363,463 ppm, which is nearly as high. In percent terms, the silver-plated bracelet was 38% lead and the eagle pendant was 36% lead.



**Silver-Plated and Gold-Plated Bracelets Contained Dangerous Levels of Lead**

In terms of absolute lead content, five of the items contained over 10 milligrams of lead. If ingested by a child, this amount of lead could cause serious and permanent medical harm, or even death.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Legislative Counsel, State of California, AB 1681 Assembly Bill – CHAPTERED (Sept. 22, 2006) (online at [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/05-06/bill/asm/ab\\_1651-1700/ab\\_1681\\_bill\\_20060922\\_chaptered.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/05-06/bill/asm/ab_1651-1700/ab_1681_bill_20060922_chaptered.html)); Illinois General Assembly, Public Act 094-0879 (online at <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=094-0879>).

<sup>7</sup> Consumer Product Safety Commission, Briefing Package for Petition Requesting Ban of Lead in Toy Jewelry (Petition No. HP 06-1), 3 (Dec. 4, 2006) (online at <http://www.cpsc.gov/LIBRARY/FOIA/FOIA07/BRIEF/LeadToyJewelry.pdf>).

<sup>8</sup> Interview of Megan Sandel, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine, by Minority Staff, House Committee on Government Reform (Dec. 8, 2006).

Other items with excessive levels of lead included a gold-plated bracelet and a Capitol charm. Even the bowl of a souvenir spoon – which, as pictured below, was not labeled for use by children but could easily end up in the mouth of a small child – contained lead in excess of the 600 ppm standard.



**A Souvenir Spoon Contained Excess Lead**

Table 1 presents the testing results for each product that contained an excessive level of lead.

<b>Table 1: Lead in Capitol Gift Shop Items Exceeds California and Illinois Limits</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Lead Content (milligrams)</b>	<b>Lead concentration (ppm)</b>	<b>Factor in excess of California and Illinois limits</b>
Capitol bracelet, silver	6661	384,594	<b>641 times</b>
Eagle pendant with link	306	363,463	<b>606 times</b>
Capitol bracelet, gold	2493	144,581	<b>241 times</b>
Capitol dome pin	73	39,346	<b>66 times</b>
Eagle pendant on cord necklace	227	29,392	<b>49 times</b>
Capitol charm	4	873.8	<b>1.5 times</b>
Souvenir spoon (spoon bowl only)	6	666.3	<b>1.1 times</b>

## IV. CONCLUSION

Jewelry and other products used by children that were purchased at four Capitol gift shops contained high levels of lead, in some cases exceeding the standard set in California and Illinois by more than 600 times. These items contained enough lead to seriously harm children who handle, mouth, or ingest them. Their presence in Capitol gift shops is an unnecessary risk to children and evidence that the voluntary approach relied on by CPSC to protect children from lead in jewelry and other children's products is not working.