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## Market surveillance of toys: situation assessment and improvement

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### Abstract

Uniform requirements have been established in the EU to ensure that safe toys are placed on the market. These requirements are monitored, simultaneously carrying out market surveillance. Despite the measures, which are organized and implemented, every year non-compliant toys are discovered on the market, which puts the most vulnerable part of society – children. The study identified the causes of non-compliant toys appearing on the market, analyzed the current situation of the market surveillance in the EU and Latvia, and made a practical study of non-compliant toys available on the market and public awareness; on the basis of which proposals for the improvement of the situation at different levels were prepared. The aim of the article is to present proposals for the improvement of market surveillance, based on the assessment of the situation in the toy market surveillance. In the study, the authors used qualitative and quantitative research methods, and comparative analysis.

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### 1. Introduction

Different toys are used on a daily basis by the most vulnerable part of our society – children, who in their development and exploration of the world are unaware of the risks to health and life that non-compliant toys can lead to. Unfortunately, non-compliant toys are still available on the market, despite the fact that in the EU manufacturers have to comply with certain requirements and toy conformity assessment is carried out in order to ensure their safe use. Hazards posed by toys are of a wide range; therefore toys have to comply with specific safety requirements regarding physical and mechanical properties, flammability, chemical properties, electrical properties, hygiene and radioactivity. Studies on different types of risks on toys have been carried out (Egan, 2002; Hora et al., 2011; Ionas

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et al., 2014, Mateus-García and Ramos-Bonilla 2014, Stephenson 2005; Yaremchuk et al., 1997, etc.). In the EU, at the national level market surveillance of toys is carried out to ensure that non-compliant, commercially available toys are identified and withdrawn or recalled from the market. Therefore, an assessment of the causes was made in order to identify why non-compliant toys are available on the market. After investigating the situation, it was discovered that one of the solutions how to reduce non-compliant toys available on the market is to improve toy market surveillance.

In order to protect the interests of consumers and to ensure toy compliance with the requirements, market surveillance is already being carried out. In the EU uniform general requirements for market surveillance have been defined. Furthermore, it should be taken into account that most of the non-compliant toys on the market are toys imported from third world countries, as evidenced by their withdrawal or recall from the market (Berman and Swani, 2010, Lipton and Barboza, 2009). At the same time, each EU Member State ensures market surveillance at national level with the help of special national initiatives. Inspections performed by Latvian market surveillance authority – the Consumer Rights Protection Centre (PTAC) – identified the fact that in the years 2009 to 2012 the number of non-compliant toys constituted 35-50 % of the total of the tested toys, indicating the seriousness of the situation and the need to take urgent action to remedy the situation. This is also indicated by the studies of other authors on the situation in the field of medicine about the indications and factors that had caused children hospitalization/referral to medical personnel (Foltran et al., 2011; Külahc et al, 2005; The Susy Safe Working Group, 2012).

The above mentioned information points to the important role that market surveillance plays in whether compliant toys will be available on the market, and what steps and to what extent will be taken to constantly monitor the situation. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that buyer awareness (because in the case of toys children are the consumers) of the situation in the market and the requirements for the toys, as well as their attention when purchasing toys are of utmost importance. Therefore, to identify the situation on the Latvian market, a practical study (based on the same criteria that are used by the inspectors of the market surveillance authorities) was performed assessing toys on the market and a survey of parents was conducted in order to gain information about their awareness of the issue of the requirements for toys and market surveillance. In the study, the authors used qualitative and quantitative research methods, and comparative analysis.

The aim of the article is to present proposals for the improvement of market surveillance, based on the assessment of toys. With practical introduction of these proposals, non-compliant toys available on the market would be reduced (by 5-7 %).

## 2. Method

To understand the reasons why non-compliant toys are available, a cause and effect evaluation was made using Ishikawa Cause and Effect or Fishbone diagram method (Lester, 2014, Rose, 2005; Ziemer, 1993). As a result, the authors identified four key aspects that may be recognized as risk factors and deficiencies due to which non-compliant toys are available on the market: legislation, manufacturer, erroneous test results and market surveillance (see Fig. 1). It is also related to manufacturer accountability and integrity, capacity of the market surveillance authorities, insufficiency of public awareness campaigns.

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