



Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA)



Noisy Toys Report

Noisy Toys Campaign – Overview

Objectives

In September 2006, CASLPA sought to advise the public of the dangers of noisy toys and began developing an extensive campaign entitled “Noisy Toys.” CASLPA wanted to alert parents and caregivers to the potential dangers of noisy toys to their child’s hearing in anticipation of the upcoming holiday shopping season. This message was an essential step in preventing harm to a child’s hearing which can lead to serious communication and learning difficulties in the future. In addition to the warning, CASLPA wanted to raise awareness of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists and to raise the profile of its association.

The campaign has since developed into a government advocacy strategy wherein CASLPA is committed to educating Members of Parliament (MPs) and Health Canada officials that some toys have the potential to harm hearing. Damage caused by exposure to noisy toys can lead to serious communication and learning difficulties.

In Canada, regulation exists under the Hazardous Products Act which bans toys emitting noise levels exceeding 100 decibels (dB). While CASLPA supports Health Canada’s efforts to protect our children’s hearing, audiologists have found that 100 dB is an unsafe level, and noise-induced hearing loss (N-IHL) could be the result. This level needs to be lowered.

Strategy

Timing was one of the key strategies employed when launching the campaign. The press conference was scheduled for October 2nd, 2006, when parents are beginning to think about Christmas and holiday toys.

In the Fall 2007 Speech from the Throne, the issue of toy safety was raised. The second press conference, a year later, was aimed at Parliamentarians as well as the general public, and was held on December 10th, 2007; even closer to the holidays.

CASLPA emphasized the danger of noisy toys while creating a sense of urgency at this time when people are thinking about toys. In addition, on December 17th, 2007, Prime Minister Harper advised that the Government will begin engaging consumer and industry stakeholders on how best to proceed with the Food and Consumer Safety Action Plan in the New Year and included the importance of safety of toys in this announcement.

Materials

Simplifying the message was indispensable in creating a larger impact on the public. The following key points were outlined in the press conferences and explained in detail in a backgrounder document which was made available to the media and was distributed to MPs:

- “How loud is too loud?”
 - CASLPA brought a noisy toy to the press conference which was used as a demonstration.
 - Providing viewers with a visual and a concrete example of what a noisy toy sounds like created a frame of reference for parents who could identify that they in fact have toys at home which produce a similar amount of noise.
 - Helpful tips on how to tell if a toy is too loud were outlined



- CASLPA recommended safety tips to consider when buying toys in an effort to warn parents and consumers on the dangers that some noisy toys can cause.

The following materials were developed over the course of the campaign:

- Media advisories announcing the press conferences
- Press releases
- Backgrounder pages (illustrated above)
- Speaking notes for spokespeople at press conferences
- Letters to MPs and Senators
- MP Survey
 - Distributed to all MPs via fax. The survey results showed that MPs are not very knowledgeable of the issues concerning toy safety, noisy toys and children's hearing, but 100% of participants were interested in more information
- Letter to Health Canada
- Grassroots Advocacy Kit for CASLPA members
- Formal Issue Paper

Execution

It was important to communicate all significant messages in both official languages and CASLPA ensured that the speakers for the press conferences were able to answer journalists' questions in English and in French, opening the door for more media coverage across the country. The message was delivered by Dr. Linda Rammage, President of CASLPA, and Chantal Kealey, Director of Audiology and Supportive Personnel. The bilingual presentation also gave credibility to CASLPA, making the association appear very well-rounded and professional.



In order to publicize the message, the following methods were used:

- Two national press conferences, held at the National Press Gallery in Ottawa to obtain maximum impact and media exposure.
 - October 2, 2006
 - December 10, 2007
- Media advisories sent to over 500 media outlets across Canada, informing the media of the press conferences. As a follow up, dozens of targeted journalists were directly contacted and encouraged to attend the press conferences.
- Letters were sent to MPs with a detailed backgrounder document to explain the message.
- An official Issue Paper was developed, outlining CASLPA's position on the noisy toys issue.
 - The Issue Paper was distributed to all CASLPA members, MPs and Senators
- Individual meetings with key players to explain the issues; including high-profile MPs and the ADM of Health Canada.
- CASLPA Member involvement
 - A member Advocacy Kit was developed and distributed in English and in French
 - Members in select ridings were contacted personally and encouraged to contact their local MP

- Follow-up Press Releases and media calls after major announcements by the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister.



RESULTS

Media Results

This was an important public sector campaign, as most parents and caregivers put a lot of faith in Health Canada's guidelines as to which toys are safe, but do not take into account the guidelines for proper use of the toy. CASLPA explained that parents need to be cautious when contemplating purchasing noisy toys for their children.

- As a result of the press conferences, TV and radio news stations reported the story throughout the day during their live broadcasts and the message was featured on many networks' 6 o'clock and 11 o'clock news.
- Major news stations, newspapers and all major media outlets were interested by the message and CASLPA representatives had multiple requests for interviews; such that they were booked solid for interviews for days following the press conference.
- The program greatly enhanced the Association's relationship with key government decision makers on Parliament Hill and with Health Canada.

The widespread media coverage was impressive:

- Close to 8 million Canadians (over 27% of the population) saw the message
 - There was coverage in print news, with circulation totals of over 3,420,000, not including online versions of print articles.
 - TV and radio hits were extremely impressive, reaching approximately 4,446,000 Canadians (13% of Canadians)
 - Key media hits included:

TV

- Global
- Radio Canada (French)
- City TV – Breakfast TV Toronto
- CTV New Edmonton

Radio

- Radio Canada Atlantic (French)
- Radio Canada Winnipeg (French)
- Multiple local radio stations

Print

- Toronto Sun
- Toronto Star
- Journal de Montreal
- Halifax Chronicle Herald
- Calgary Sun

Web

- Medical News Today Me .ca CTV
- Biology Online Aud .ca Can
- Healthy Hearing.com Hea C.ca CB



RESULTS

Lobby Day

Following the press conference on December 10th, 2007, CASLPA met with a total of 4 MPs as part of a mini lobby day. These MPs included

- Steven Fletcher, Conservative MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health
- Pat Davidson, Conservative MP, Member of Health Committee
- David Tilson, Conservative MP, Member of the Health Committee
- Robert Thibault, Liberal MP, Member of Health Committee



Meeting with Key Players

As a result of CASLPA's widespread media coverage and in light of the discussion and public concern surrounding toy safety generally, Members of Parliament were enthusiastic to speak with CASLPA about the importance of noise levels in toys as an important element of toy safety.

In addition to the meetings during the lobby day, CASLPA delegates and members have met with key players, including members of the Health committee from every political party and various provinces. Meetings have taken place with the following individuals:

- Dr. Colin Carrie, Conservative MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry
- Judy Wasylcia-Leis, NDP MP, NDP Health Critic and Member of Health Committee
- Dr. Carolyn Bennett, Liberal MP, Liberal Health Critic and member of Health Committee. Former Vice-Chair of Health Committee
- Joy Smith, Conservative MP, Chair of the Health Committee *met with Ms. Smith's Parliamentary Assistant and meeting with the MP scheduled for early June
- Rob Merrifield, Conservative MP, Former Chair of the Health Committee, current Member of the Health Committee
- Christiane Gagnon, Bloc Québécois MP, Vice-Chair of the Health Committee and Bloc Health Critic *met with Ms. Gagnon's Parliamentary Assistant
- Luc Malo, Bloc MP, Member of Health Committee
- Margaret Gregg, Regional Communications Advisor for Minister Gregory Thompson
- Robert Carrier, Bloc Québécois MP

Meeting with Health Canada

CASLPA also had the opportunity to speak directly with the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) at Health Canada, as well as the Director General. In this meeting, the following items were discussed:

- CASLPA's concerns with the current Hazardous Products Act, which bans toys emitting noise levels greater than 100 decibels.
- Health Canada will be looking at developing more comprehensive consumer education on the impact of noisy toys and hearing health, including changes to the current web site.
- They will also be introducing new consumer products legislation that is different from the current Hazardous Products Act. This new legislation will put the onus on Industry to ensure that products are safe. This legislation will require manufacturers to provide information on consumer complaints.
- Health Canada committed to focusing more on health promotion initiatives and encouraging voluntary standard setting and commitment to work with CASLPA to develop these voluntary standards.
- Reviewing all available research on the dangerous impact of noise on hearing health - focusing on chronic implications vs. the current focus on immediate impact.
- Reviewing and providing input on experimental design of a study on noisy toys, if CASLPA can source funding for this research.

As a result of this positive meeting, CASLPA has been added to Health Canada's list of stakeholders and has since been invited to participate in an industry conference on new proposed product safety legislation.

Interest from MPs and Senators

Letters have been received by CASLPA from the offices of various MPs and Senators, acknowledging receipt of the Issue Paper and background information on the *Hazardous Products Act* and demonstrating support for the noisy toys initiatives.

- Gilles Duceppe, Bloc Québécois MP and Leader
- Lawrence Cannon, Conservative MP and cabinet minister
- Marilyn Trenholme Counsell, Senator
- Raynell Andreychuk, Senator
- Irene Mathysen, NDP MP
- Blair Wilson, Independent MP
- Tommy Banks, Senator
- Michael Fortier, Senator
- Mac Harb, Senator
- Tina Keeper, Liberal MP

RESULTS

Private Member's Bill

CASLPA, after a very effective meeting with Member of Parliament, Judy Wasylycia-Leis, has identified this MP as a champion in the noisy toys campaign.

Judy Wasylycia-Leis formally announced, via a national press conference on Parliament Hill, her support of CASLPA and that she will be taking proactive steps to ensure the health of our children's hearing through her tabling of a Private Member's Bill.

Ms. Wasylycia-Leis agrees that the current Hazardous Products Act noise limit of 100 decibels is too high and her Private Member's Bill would see this piece of legislation revised to allow 75 decibels as the maximum level.

Her announcement was made public on the first day of Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, May 1st, 2008. Ondina Love, CASLPA Executive Director, and Chantal Kealey, Director of Audiology and Supportive Personnel, were invited to speak at the press conference. CASLPA made its support for this bill known to Canadians, and further reinforced the message that the government needs to be proactive in order to protect our children's hearing.

As a result of her announcement, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis was featured in newspapers and on CTV's Mike Duffy Live, where she stressed the importance of moving quickly on this important piece of legislation.

CANADA

Noisy toys harmful to children, private member's bill backers say

BY SARAH SCHMIDT

Health professionals and opposition politicians joined forces yesterday to propose a bill to ban toys that are so loud they could be causing permanent hearing loss in children.

The current rule in Canada allows toys as loud as one decibel, comparable to the sound of a lawnmower or a motorcycle and not far off a sandblaster or a rock concert, estimated to be 100 decibels.

Judy Wasylycia-Leis, health critic for the New Democrats, tabled a private member's bill yesterday to lower the permissible noise level in children's toys to 75 decibels, the safety limit recognized by the World Health Organization.

All toys above this noise threshold would be banned under the Hazardous Products Act, which Ms. Wasylycia-Leis characterized as "misguided and out of date and harmful to kids."

"We are actually damaging kids' hearing at the point in time when you can have the most impact in terms of the development of their hearing. Who would have thought a toy when turned on and put close to your ear can be damaging? I don't think many parents know this, and the toy companies clearly are not going to do it on their own."

During a news conference yesterday, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis showcased a few toys that exceed one decibel when held close to the ear, common when children play with toys. The singing stuffed animal, Beatch Bunny, registered at one decibel and a plastic power tool checked in at eight.

Ondina Love, executive director of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, said the consensus among experts was that the current limit was "too high." She said the proposal to reduce the noise threshold to 75 decibels would lead "to the protection of the hearing health of millions of children."

Researchers have found that the inner ear of a child is more sensitive to noise and may be susceptible to hearing loss for noise exposures that are safe for adults.

Health Minister Tony Clement's office said the ministry was planning a review of its toy standards and the noise decibel limit "in light of recent developments in recognized international toy safety standards relating to safe sound limits for toys."

In the meantime, the legislative limit in Canada will be accordingly unchanged.

Last month, a Grade 8 student in Vancouver tested 33 toys for young children to determine whether the noise levels exceeded the one-decibel limit, using the method employed by Health Canada's Product Safety Laboratory. The science project, titled "Totes 'n' Toys," found all toys were below the limit when held at arm's length, but one half-enclosed toy decibel when held close to the ear.

The most recent available data, results of Health Canada's recent Product Safety Program, found only one of 24 toys tested in its product safety lab exceeded the 100dB limit when held at arm's length.

NOW LOUD IS TOO LOUD?

A sampling of decibel levels.

Normal conversation	70dB
Alarm clock	90dB
Screaming child	90dB
Lawnmower	100dB
Snowmobile	100dB
Motorcycle	100dB
Chain saw	110dB
Handmower	115dB
Rock concert	115dB
Garage band	140dB

Source: writing@ Marshall Chisholm, Musicians' Clinic of Canada; photographer Michael Forester, University of Kent; audiologist William Clark, Central Institute for the Deaf.

Award Winning Campaign

CASLPA's 2006 Noisy Toys campaign was recognized as an international award winner by PR News, a prominent American publication. Now in its 61st year, PR News is the most trusted, executive level, reader-supported publication that helps enhance the business impact of PR.

CASLPA's Noisy Toys campaign is among the best of the best! It was recognized for this international award in the prestigious Public Service Campaign category among other excellent campaigns, many of these being large American associations with sizeable budgets.

The awards presentation was on December 4th, 2007 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. where the CASLPA campaign was formally recognized with a crystal trophy symbolizing this accomplishment.

In addition to the media coverage, the program greatly enhanced CASLPA's relationship with key government decision makers on Parliament Hill and with Industry Canada.



Next Steps

The Noisy Toys campaign has been very successful, but the fight is not over. CASLPA has worked hard over the past few years, informing the public and Members of Parliament of the dangers of noisy toys.

CASLPA will continue meeting with Members of Parliament, working closely with Judy Wasylycia-Leis as she moves forward with her Private Member's Bill, and providing updates to CASLPA members.

As the government moves forward with Bill C-52 which focuses on product safety, CASLPA will work hard to ensure that key decision makers are informed of the importance of noise levels in toys as a key element of toy safety as the *Hazardous Products Act* is being reviewed.

CASLPA's ultimate goal is to see the accepted decibel level lowered from 100 decibels which will lead to the protection of the hearing health of millions of Canadian children.