Philadephia University Institute for Textile and Apparel Product Safety preliminary findings indicate hazardous chemicals in children’s clothing and car seats

PHILADELPHIA, November 30, 2007 – Amid growing concerns about the safety of imported products, preliminary results from Philadelphia University’s Institute for Textile and Apparel Product Safety found elevated levels of hazardous chemicals present in samples of children’s clothing and car seats made overseas.

The early tests have found heightened levels of formaldehyde in samples of blouses and khaki pants, as well as high levels of brominated resins in car seats. Formaldehyde is commonly used as a permanent press agent, while brominated resins are a flame retardant used in car seats, mattresses and other consumer goods.

“Although we are still in the preliminary stages of testing, we are concerned that the levels of formaldehyde and brominated flame retardants we are starting to find are known to have health consequences, especially for children,” said David Brookstein, Sc.D., director of the Institute for Textile and Apparel Product Safety.

The Institute for Textile and Apparel Product Safety (ITAPS) was established in September in the wake of growing government and public concern about the safety of a wide range of consumer items, particularly lead-tainted toys.

The Institute is conducting research to determine if potentially toxic chemicals are present in imported clothing and other textile products, identify which toxic chemicals and agents are being used and the extent of their use and help establish protocols for testing and evaluating imported items.

Philadelphia University, with its long history of textile-related programs and a research center dedicated to state-of-the-art research in textiles and apparel, is uniquely positioned to lead efforts to identify problems and help ensure the safety of imported apparel.
Meanwhile, legislation recently introduced in Congress would direct the Consumer Product Safety Commission to investigate potential safety dangers in children’s clothing and promulgate rules necessary to ensure these items are safe. For now, however, there are few U.S. regulatory standards for imported clothing or textiles.

“It’s time for our legislators to consider the serious toxic agents that are found on the clothes we wear, the mattresses we sleep on and the car seats our children sit in,” Brookstein said.

For the year that ended July 31, more than $93 billion in textiles and apparel were imported to the U.S. from around the globe, according to data from the Office of Textiles and Apparel of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Public concern about imports has been growing in response to highly-publicized incidents involving Chinese-made toys and toothpaste. Mattel recently recalled some 9.5 million toys because of concerns about lead. In June, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration warned consumers not to use toothpaste made in China after some brands were found to contain a poisonous ingredient also found in antifreeze.

In light of these concerns, President Bush in July established the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety, which last month issued recommendations to improve the safety of imported products.

Philadelphia University, founded in 1884, is a private university with 3,500 full- and part-time students enrolled in more than 50 undergraduate and graduate programs. The University includes Schools of Architecture, Business Administration, Design and Media, Engineering and Textiles, Liberal Arts, and Science and Health.

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