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"Our mission: is to enrich the lives of people and pets by bringing them together."

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# Consumer Watchdog

We routinely get all sorts of pet products, including toys sent to us for inclusion in the magazine. Call us crazy, but instead of just receiving product information and a fluffy description from the distributor or manufacturer, we prefer to take a long look at the products we feature. Whether it be reading up on the ingredients or seeing how a product performs—it's important to us that we at least give our readers, the consumers (or at least the purchasers of our consuming pets) the raw bones on what we feature.

Sometimes we get it wrong—like an Italian inspired bag for dog walking essentials that we featured in an early edition. The manufacturer and distributor rushed out this puppy before they had really done any strength tests of the material and design. It started disintegrating and the stitching came apart after a few uses. We try really hard to bring you the facts on products and strive to make sure descriptions are accurate and the images are representative and high in quality.

Urban Animal's toy tester, Lilly, has quite the appetite for destruction and so we often get her to try out products, especially toys. A new line of toys came from Moose, a well-known children's toy manufacturer who is branching out into the lucrative pet toy market. Part of their collection includes a Flintstone style range of bone and animal print inspired toys.

We were alarmed when Lilly's dedicated effort in shredding, chomping and chewing revealed some contents that seem questionable at best and potentially dangerous at worst. Within the furry bone toy was a flimsy mesh pouch that contained thousands of tiny plastic particles, the size and look of sugar crystals. After this discovery, there was no way we would feature this product. When we contacted the company, a spokeswoman was unable to explain why the toy had these dangerous components and was unable to confirm the content of any of their toys.

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It's vital to pay attention to dog-toy play and observe bone eating or chew treat consumption as a general safety precaution. But we're startled that these small particles could easily be ingested or inhaled—not just by a loved dog but by a crawling toddler.

Views on dog ownership have changed considerably in the last 15 years and we're seeing more family dogs spending their time inside the home, interacting, eating and playing. It's our concern that currently there are no safety standards or guidelines for dog toys, unlike the standards that are in place for children's toys. It begs the question that if dog toys are commonplace within the family home, and there is a chance that small children can have access to the contents, then why aren't there standards in place to protect all our family members.

We rang Product Recalls Australia, a compliance strategies branch of the ACCC (The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission). Their spokeswoman was most helpful in explaining that they couldn't act on our concerns—dog toy safety and standards are not covered. So they were powerless to suggest a voluntary recall to the distributor/manufacturer. Their site lists all sorts of products being recalled, from baby rattles, cheese, petrol, novelty drinks, toddler toys, herbal tea and chemicals—but nothing to do with pet toys.

The closest we've seen to safety concerns involving the family pooch was the in-depth testing and research Choice Magazine did on retractable leads. Back in January 2006 a 10-year old girl was walking the family dog when it decided to pull forward in a moment of excitement. As the dog lurched forward the retractable lead reached its length and unexpectedly the dog clip snapped. The retractable lead rebounded and the remainder of the clip swung swiftly back into the eye of the little girl. Louise Hiatt of Caravonica, Queensland lost the sight in her eye, all while doing something quite normal, walking her family's Dachshund.

The Woofaz Pet Products leash was retailing between \$1 and \$5 through various outlets and online stores. It should be noted that nine months after this incident, the Woofaz Pet Products leash was still on sale and only after Choice Magazine tested 12 retractables and notified the ACCC of the safety concerns was it recalled. This horrible accident prompted a ban on the sale of this product by the ACCC and shows that pet products are only recalled once there is an incidence of harm to a human and it takes some time for a ban to occur.

Choice's strength testing found that many retractables have no guidelines for the weight or size of your dog. They tested the dog leads to a maximum force of 500 N, which is equivalent to an average-size (20 kg) dog pulling two-and-a-half times its weight, a force that smaller, weaker people would have problems resisting. Most of the brands that passed their tests retail between \$20 to \$50.

Choice couldn't test all the retractables on the market, however they say that if you still want to use a retractable look for sturdy construction. A sturdy, heavy clasp, and never use one that's rated lower than the weight of your dog.

My advice is if your dog is a puller then you would be better served using a correctly fitted Halti® or Gentle Leader® brand head collar and seeking some professional training advice. Most of us want our dogs to walk on a loose lead without pulling. A retractable allows your dog to pull and this leads to more freedom—the more the pull and more freedom and distance they obtain. This is quite the opposite of what you want to achieve.