Age-appropriate play

Unfortunately, not all toys are safe or age-appropriate. Injury often results when a toy is misused or used by children who are too young for that particular toy. This is very tragic considering how much effort goes into protecting the youngest members of society.

“The right to safety is a paramount right of a consumer,” clarifies Antonio Bonacruz, Test Coordinator of children’s products at CHOICE, a consumer advocacy group based in Australia. “Consumers expect that toys are as safe as they can be. Toy suppliers must ensure that the toys they supply are suitable for the age of the child for which they are intended.”

Toy makers need to be aware that children of different ages have varying abilities, interests, preferences and strengths. They also need to consider that the safety of children relies on giving them the right toys to suit these traits. Bonacruz explains: “Suppliers must clearly indicate the age suitability on toys, and they must do it based on reliable sources such as standards and professional evaluation, and not on guesses, and certainly not on what they simply think would cover their backs.”

Age determination is an important factor in ensuring that toys are appropriate and safe for their “little” users, says Dr Pratik Ichhaporia, Director, Technical Services, North America, at Intertek, a total quality assurance provider. He explains: “Age grading of toys is very important to enable the manufacturer to design toys for intended audiences and ensure that a toy is subjected to appropriate safety requirements.”

Safeguards and standards giving guidance as to the age appropriateness of certain toys can make a significant positive impact on the safety of toys in the marketplace. These safeguards can also contribute to a dramatic decline in toy-related injuries.

Diverging standards

Age grading of toys has long been one of the more subjective tasks for manufacturers, retailers, importers and testing labs. Diverging national and regional standards have only complicated matters further by offering no unique source of reliable information.