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WELLBEING

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Making Your (Toy) List and Checking it Twice

This may be the year mom and dad will tell the grandparents it is fine to give the kids money instead of buying a present. The toy recalls and scares of recent months have made it more challenging to shop with confidence for holiday toys and games.

Rest assured that retailers, toy associations and toy makers have been retesting toys and setting up websites where parents can find recall notices, safety info and buying tips. One toy maker has even destroyed thousands of toys at a Mexico facility when those items were found to have high levels of lead.



Of course, the ultimate responsibility lies with parents to make sure only safe and appropriate items are coming into the home. The best defense is education and common sense. Whether you are buying toys and games yourself, or

receiving them from friends and relatives, check them out carefully. Apply these guides to items you buy for charity giveaways, as well. Answer the following before you buy:

- What is the age recommendation?
- Read all labels and instructions: What do the instructions and warnings say?*
- What does the toy look and feel like?
- What sounds does it make? Does it move? Light up? Become hot?
- If batteries are needed, is the compartment secure?

*Ask the retailer if you can examine a sample toy or game, so you can actually read the instructions ahead of time.

Once a gift is in your house, make sure it remains safe. Keep older kids' toys and games out of infants' hands. Periodically check all toys and repair or toss broken items.

The National Safety Council offers these pointers for safe holiday giving:

- Be sure any toy or item given to infants or small children is too big to get caught in the throat, nose or ears. **(Experts say a good rule of thumb is that any toy or piece that fits through a toilet paper roll is too small for an infant or young child.)**
- Avoid toys with small parts that can be pulled or broken off.
- If you are giving toys to several children in one family, keep in mind that younger children will want to play with older kids' toys.
- Keep holiday plants away from young children who may view them as something to chew on. Be especially careful with poinsettias, mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry, and amaryllis.

Don't forget the older friends and relatives. Make sure the gifts you are giving grandpa or great aunt Marge can be easily used and enjoyed. The Safety Council recommends selecting gifts that are not heavy or awkward to handle. For persons with arthritis, select items that can be easily opened and closed; avoid gifts that require assembly. Choose books with large type for anyone with impaired vision.



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Now's the Time to Drive Leaner and Greener



Here is a New Year's Resolution the whole family (or even the whole neighborhood) can start on now. It's a pretty painless way to save some money, do something positive for your health and make your corner of the earth a little greener. A few "tweaks" in your driving habits can add up to gas savings *and* lower carbon emissions. It's a "green/green" situation.

If you...	You can ...
Drive the speed limit (55 mph mostly)	Burn 10% less fuel at 55 mph than at 65 mph*. And the difference between 60 mph and 80 mph is around 15%. * Source: American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy.
Shop with a friend or neighbor	Share the cost of gas used for the trip
Keep your car's tires inflated to the correct PSI (generally in the mid-30s)	Increase your mileage up to 5%. (You lose 1% in fuel efficiency for every 2 PSI below maximum tire pressure)
Take the bus for shorter-distance trips	Save your gas, help keep the roads less crowded and arrive at your destination more relaxed. A motor coach uses just a gallon of fuel for more than 146 passenger miles. One bus can replace up to 56 passenger cars, and it emits fewer pounds of carbon dioxide roundtrip than a mid-sized car, a commercial airliner, or a passenger train. A good choice for tight budgets is MegaBus – a direct bus from Chicago to 13 Midwestern cities: one-way to Milwaukee is \$3; Minneapolis \$10, and Detroit \$8.
Keep a constant speed	Avoid a loss of up to 33% in fuel economy that is caused by rapid acceleration and braking.
Lighten your load	Reduce your load by 100 pounds and save about 2% in gas. Let the kids walk when possible.
Go synthetic (for your motor oil)	You can realize a 5% to 10% fuel efficiency gain by switching to a synthetic motor oil.

Source: The Daily Green

Did you know?

Every gallon of gasoline you burn produces 19 pounds of carbon dioxide (25 pounds if you add in the energy it takes to make and distribute that gas)?

You are using about 18 cents worth of gas as you wait for your drive-thru burger and fries. That adds up to one billion car minutes annually, just at Burger King, according to *Quick Service Restaurant Magazine*. Total fuel cost of idling at every drive-through in America: hundreds of millions of dollars.

