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## G94-1211 Safety in Children's Arts and Crafts Projects

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# Safety in Children's Arts and Crafts Projects

This NebGuide discusses the steps to take to ensure safety with arts and crafts materials and environments.

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*Shirley Niemeyer, Extension Specialist, Home Environment*

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Arts and crafts activities let young children express themselves creatively. If you offer arts and crafts, it's important to have safe products and tools for the children in your care to use.

Some arts and crafts products contain solvents or materials that may expose children to toxic ingredients, fumes, or dusts.

The Center for Occupational Hazards recommends not letting children under 12 years of age use toxic art products. The center suggests checking the labels on art materials, and using only those identified as safe for children's use.

It's not easy to determine which arts and crafts tools and materials are safe for children. Some materials contain toxic or harmful chemicals, yet their labels will have inadequate information about ingredients or precautions such as whether they are safe for children.

## ***Arts and crafts product labels***

Always read the packaging label on any arts and crafts product or tool. Follow carefully the directions and precautions listed on the label.

If the arts and crafts product label does not have enough information for you to decide whether it is safe, contact the manufacturer. Look for the company's phone number or address on the label.

Ask the manufacturer about product use with young children. Also, ask for a copy of the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). The MSDS gives specific information about flammability, toxicity, ingredients, and use.

When reading the product label, look for these three phrases:

1. Nontoxic

2. Meets American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) regulations for chronic long-term health hazards
3. Certified Product (CP) or Approved Product (AP).

### **(1) Nontoxic**

When a manufacturer advertises a product as "nontoxic," it means the product has passed the acute or short-term toxicity test required by the Federal Hazardous Substance Act. Nothing, however, is implied about the product's long-term toxicity. Therefore, materials that may cause long-term toxicity could carry a "nontoxic" label.

### **(2) Meets ASTM regulations for long-term health hazards**

To address the issue of long-term toxicity, the Labeling of Hazardous Art Materials Act took effect in 1990. This new law requires labels of hazardous art materials to disclose the potential for chronic long-term health hazards.

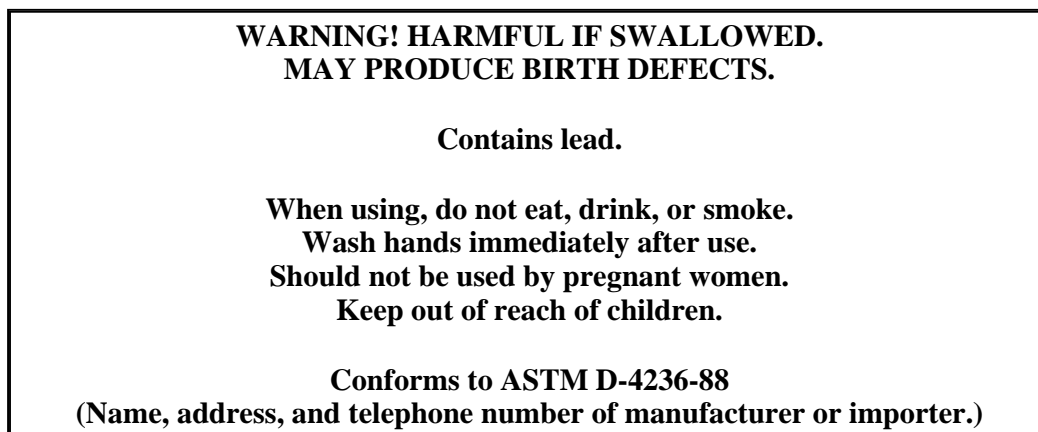
The Labeling of Hazardous Art Materials Act supplements the Federal Hazardous Substances Act. This act spells out labeling requirements for acute hazards such as flammability or irritation.

Some manufacturers voluntarily have labeled arts and crafts materials for such hazards. The new law, however, mandates labeling standards.

The law requires labeling of such products as solvents, spray paints, silk screen inks, adhesives, and any other "substance marketed or represented as suitable for use in any phase of the creation of a visual or graphic art of any medium." Although only potentially hazardous art materials must have safety labeling, all art materials should bear a statement indicating if they conform with ASTM D-4236-88 as in Example 1.

### **(3) Certified Product (CP) or Approved Product (AP)**

The Certified Product (CP) or Approved Product (AP) seal identifies some art materials as safe for children's use. To carry either of these seals, an authority on toxicology from the Art and Craft Materials Institute has evaluated the product. This certification means there are no materials in the art product in sufficient quantity to be toxic or to injure the body even if ingested.



**Example 1. An arts product label that confirms with ASTM D-4236-88.**

**Exposure**

Beware of exposing the children in your care (your staff and yourself, too) to the toxic and harmful chemicals found in some arts and crafts materials. Exposure may occur through the skin, by inhalation, or by ingestion.

**Through the skin---**Exposure through the skin may result in skin problems and dermatitis. Skin is a protective organ. Acids, alkalis, peroxides, organic solvents, bleaches and other chemicals may penetrate and injure the skin.

**Inhalation---**You can inhale smoke, fumes, dusts, and spray mists. These materials may damage the lining of your airways and lungs.

**Ingestion--**Ingestion of dangerous materials may occur when you eat, drink, or prepare food with contaminated hands or while wearing contaminated clothing. It also occurs when you use contaminated containers or utensils for serving or storing food.

## **Prevention**

**Substitute--**Use less hazardous art materials and solvents instead of more harmful products. There are many substitutions that may be safer for use around young children.

For example, use water-based products instead of oil-based. Remember, though, to read the label and look for those materials identified as safe for children's use. Also, keep in mind that you can clean water-based products with water instead of other solvents. Consider letting the children use safe water-based adhesives instead of flammable rubber cement.

It may be safer to buy supplies in premixed paste or liquid formulations instead of powder forms. This reduces exposure to dusts. Try to avoid using aerosol sprays because of the fine mists that you or the children can inhale.

Be sure to check the product label and the MSDS for specific information. If in doubt, contact the manufacturer, a toxicologist, or a poison control center for more information.

**Equip craft and work areas properly; keep areas clean--**Work surfaces should be hard and smooth for easy and thorough cleaning. Post emergency phone numbers by the telephone.

**Ventilate--**For the children's safety, ventilate the craft area. Consider using a fan to blow air out one window while fresh air is coming in another window; this is called cross ventilation. A fan simply moving air around a room, however, is not an effective method of ventilation because it allows vapors to disperse throughout your child care facility. You may need to install an exhaust system.

**Store materials safely--**Keep containers tightly closed when not in use. Keep products in their original containers so you or staff members can read the label or directions. Never store materials in food containers.

**Protect against exposure--**Avoid skin contact by having the children wear protective clothing such as gloves, long sleeves and pants, aprons, or other covers. Do not allow food or drinks in the art area because of the risk of contamination. Have children wash their hands carefully after doing arts and crafts.

**Use age-appropriate products--**Do not let children use adult art materials that contain toxic solvents, glues, metals, acids, or alkalis. Do not let children ingest products that feature special colors, odors, or flavors.

## **Tools**

Select and use safe tools for craft projects. Also, keep in mind the children's abilities to handle tools. Tools

such as scissors, paint brushes, and pencils can cause injury if handled improperly.

Generally, examine the tool for sharp edges or points. Make sure the tool is not so small that any of the children can swallow or choke on it.

Teach the children how to use appropriate tools safely. When not in use, pick up and store arts and crafts tools in a safe place.

### **For more information**

**The Art Hazards Information Center, a project of the Center for Occupational Hazards, will answer written and telephone inquiries about arts and crafts materials hazards and precautions. The information center has several publications including age-appropriate listings. For a publication list, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope, and write to:**

**Art Hazards Information Center  
5 Beekman St., Suite 1030  
New York, NY 10038  
(212) 227-6220**

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***File G1211 under: SAFETY***

***B-5, Home***

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