



Interview with

Catherine H.

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As senior director of product safety at Mattel/Fisher-Price, Kitty Pilarz works in the vanguard of international standardization for toys and juvenile products. She brings to her new role as chairman of the ASTM board of directors a wealth of knowledge about the part standards play in both ensuring public safety and facilitating trade in the global economy.

Would you describe the scope of your position at Mattel/Fisher-Price?

I'm part of the team responsible for the safety of our toys and juvenile products. Of course, everyone who works in product development and design shares in the safety responsibility, but my team is focused only on product safety, with no other job responsibilities. In addition to ensuring product safety itself, my group does training throughout the Mattel organization on how to design and test for safer toys.

My group also conducts research on emerging risks to children. We work with medical and dental professionals, for example, to study how children could be injured by products. We also study how children interact with products in the child research department, and focus heavily on consumer feedback. When we send a product into the market, we get a lot of feedback from consumers about how their children interacted with it; that is a great source of information. It's not easy to foresee exactly what a child will do with a product.

When we identify the need to recall a product, I manage the recall process as well, which involves people throughout the organization. We're a worldwide company, so recalls typically take place on a multinational level and involve the marketing department, sales organizations, the legal and logistics teams, the engineering group and consumer relations.

How does Mattel/Fisher-Price's hazard analysis program assure product safety and conformity to standards?

Our hazard analysis program enhances product safety by evaluating products above and beyond their conformance to standards. Standards and testing cannot completely assure product safety because standardization does not foresee all the possible new designs or ways that users might interact with products. That's why it's so important to have a hazard analysis program in which highly experienced, trained people evaluate products — not only based on their knowledge of standards, but their

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2011 Chairman of the ASTM Board of Directors

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knowledge of how children really use products — to identify hazards that may not yet be addressed by standards.

How does your company manage varying regional regulatory demands for international production?

The area of toys and children's products is very highly regulated, not only in the United States but throughout the world. We have a team of people who study regulations as they are developed — or even as those regulations are being considered — to assure that Mattel's standards are in compliance with all international regulations. The standards and regulations being developed today for children's products are very far-reaching, not only for physical and mechanical issues, but electrical and chemical issues as well. And we make sure that, whenever the industry sector is permitted to participate in regulatory development, we are there.

Despite manufacturers' best efforts to design and manufacture products with safety first in mind, unforeseen toy safety issues still arise, such as recent problems with lead and magnets in toys. How can and do standards play a role in how industry and government respond to these problems?

Voluntary consensus standards provide a path for all stakeholders to respond quickly to product safety issues. As an example, a few years ago, the consensus standards process quickly addressed emerging magnet hazards in toys. Through the ASTM process, government, consumers, medical professionals, testing laboratories and industry worked together to find a solution to the magnet hazard issue in just nine months.

While legislators and regulators are responsible for ensuring public safety along with industry, the federal government itself cannot be as responsive as the private-sector voluntary standards system. The federal crib standard is 30 years old, but the ASTM crib standard was recently updated three times in one year.

How do standards impact innovation at companies such as Mattel/Fisher-Price?

ASTM International standards are developed to address safety issues, but they also foster creativity and innovation by being performance-based rather than design-restrictive whenever possible.

Many members of the Mattel/Fisher-Price staff participate in standards development. How does your company both contribute to standards development and use standards?

We currently have 16 technical staff members directly involved in standards worldwide, plus additional staff that support their efforts. Since we are the largest toy company in the world as well as a major producer of juvenile products, we have an obligation to contribute to the standards development process. But, as a company, we also benefit from our participation — it is a wonderful opportunity for interaction with



safety experts, it fosters the candid sharing of safety information, and it provides access to incident data and expertise at the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

What is the nature of the partnership between Committee F15 and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission? How has it evolved over the years that you have been working with F15?

The CPSC is in an active rulemaking process for many categories of juvenile products, which are referred to as “durable goods” in the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act. So the F15 subcommittees are working to align roughly 12 ASTM standards with CPSC’s requirements as they relate to the CPSIA. The committee meets frequently — there’s a constant exchange of information in hopes that, at the time of final rulemaking, the CPSC can rely on the ASTM standards and adopt those. We won’t always have perfect alignment between the ASTM standards and CPSC’s requirements, but there is now a great opportunity to make sure that this alignment is as close as it can be. Everyone wants to get the best standard in place, on time.

In general, the standards process has evolved to address many safety issues that, frankly, would not have been addressed 10 or 20 years ago by standards. In addition, the expectations of legislators, regulators and the public are higher today. As a result, I think standards are much more comprehensive, and the interaction among all the stakeholders improves every year.

You have been involved in efforts to internationally align toy safety standards through the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. Can you describe that effort and the outcome?

Many people involved in the standards development process have a great desire to see the alignment of toy safety standards from various nations and regions. All manufacturers experience compliance challenges when there are different standards around the world, standards that are also changing all the time.

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BIOGRAPHY

CATHERINE (KITTY) H. PILARZ is senior director of Mattel/Fisher-Price product safety in East Aurora, N.Y., which designs, manufactures and markets toys and family products sold in more than 150 nations around the world.

In her position, which she assumed in 2001, Pilarz is responsible for the safety policy of the Mattel and Fisher-Price product lines, which helps to assure that all products conform to corporate safety requirements. She is responsible for the Mattel hazard analysis procedures, which are used to audit new products to assure safety, and she provides technical direction for product development related to safety issues.

In 1980, Pilarz graduated from the State University of New York at Buffalo with a B.S. in mechanical engineering, and that same year she started working for Fisher-Price as an engineer-in-training. While a project engineer in international operations and conducting analysis and planning for international production, she received her M.B.A. from Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1983. She also held positions as a manufacturing engineer and as a quality control engineer before becoming manager of product safety and reliability in 1987.

Pilarz is a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the American Society for Quality. Through ASQ, she has earned the designations of certified reliability engineer and certified quality engineer.

In ASTM International, Pilarz is vice chairman of new projects for Committee F15 on Consumer Products, co-chairman of Subcommittee F15.18 on Cribs, Toddler Beds, Play Yards, Bassinets, Cradles and Changing Tables, and a participant in many other F15 subcommittees. She was honored with the 2006 ASTM Award of Merit and accompanying title of fellow for her contributions to F15. She has served on the ASTM board of directors since 2006.

Pilarz has served as symposium chair for the International Consumer Product Health and Safety Organization, and as president and board member of that group, which works to promote product safety through education and communication. She received a 40 under 40 Award in 1998 from *Business First* magazine.

Standards provide a path for all stakeholders to respond quickly to product safety issues.

One of the initiatives that came about as a result of the APEC efforts was conducting an ASTM toy safety meeting connected to an ISO [International Organization for Standardization] toy committee meeting in New York in November 2009. We invited all ISO delegates to attend the ASTM meeting so that they could participate with no barriers — technical expert to technical expert, rather than country to country. That meeting was very beneficial and has started a dialogue that is ongoing. As standards developers in Europe prepare to address certain areas, we now can work very closely with them to assure that our standards are more consistent with each other.

How has Committee F15 worked with other national, regional and international standards development organizations to try to achieve harmonization in toy safety standards?

In addition to our increasing work with regulators and standards developers around the world, one of the Committee F15 objectives is to evaluate international standards before developing a unique ASTM solution to an issue. When I was chairman of F15, I communicated with all subcommittee chairmen to remind them that we are in a worldwide economy and not to start developing standards without a comprehensive evaluation of all the international approaches.

How are ASTM standards used for international commerce in toys and children's products?

ASTM standards are used throughout the world and are part of regulations, not only in the United States but in other countries, so compliance with ASTM standards is essential to surviving in today's business world.



George Kelly, lead technician, and Pilarz prepare a toy for the drop test found in ASTM standard F963, Consumer Safety Specification for Toy Safety.

Obviously, if the standards are directly referenced in a regulation, as has happened with the 2008 passage of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, companies are obliged to comply if they wish to enter a particular market. With toys, cribs and perhaps soon a number of additional juvenile product categories, it is mandatory to comply with certain ASTM standards for products to be sold in the United States.

Much of the public awareness of standardization is heightened by the passage of regulations like the CPSIA, and so the public has an impression that the voluntary standards system is something of a new concept. But in fact, prior to its incorporation into law, the ASTM standard for toys [F963, Consumer Safety Specification for Toy Safety] was widely relied upon around the world to produce safe products. A recent international survey conducted as part of the APEC Toy Safety Initiative bears this out. Eight of the 21 countries surveyed reported that they relied upon the ASTM standard for toys. The same holds true for many other product categories.

There are countless consumer goods being safely imported, exported and used all over the globe, and most do not have any type of specific regulation associated with them. These products — whether a juvenile product, a shopping cart, a portable gas can, a piece of playground equipment or a candle — all have ASTM standards that are relied upon by the global marketplace (through mandate or voluntarily) to assure the highest level of safety through the guidance to manufacturers, end consumers and regulators alike.

What role can and do consumers play in the standards development process?

Consumers play a very powerful role in the development of standards. Consumer participation demonstrates “the power of one”: one person can come to the table and truly make a difference in an ASTM standard. Committee F15 members like Nancy Cowles of Kids in Danger, Don Mays from Consumers Union, Jack Walsh of Keeping Babies Safe and Rachel Weintraub from the Consumer Federation of America certainly demonstrate that idea. Consumers are highly respected and influential in the process.

With respect to maintaining consumer participation, I think we do better today than we did, say, 10 years ago. More



The play lab at Fisher-Price headquarters in East Aurora, N.Y., offers Pilarz and colleagues a chance to observe how children interact with commercially available toys or products in development.

consumers participate, and we have more collaboration with consumer groups. One of the major benefits of the ASTM process is bringing many stakeholders to the table together so that they develop a working relationship. It's often that I will talk not only to the CPSC about an issue, but to consumer advocates, and I value their input equally. As a group, the members of Committee F15 represent not only their own interest area; everyone shares information to advance safety.

What challenges do you see ahead for ASTM International? How would you determine ASTM's success in the coming several years?

Our challenge is to make sure that, going forward, ASTM is as strong as possible on the international front. Sometimes people still see the “A” in ASTM and think that we are too “American”; they are not aware of how very international ASTM is and the fact that ASTM standards are used — and we get technical contributions from — countries throughout the world.

Another challenge is to continue to work effectively with other standards development organizations.

I look at ASTM from a consumer product perspective, and I think our ongoing challenge and our most important measure of success is reducing injuries and making safer products on a worldwide basis.