



ASHLEY FRASER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

To help prevent hearing loss, NDP MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis wants to lower the permissible noise level in children's toys to 75 decibels. The toy she's holding, the singing Beach Bunny, registers at 106 decibels.

## Noisy toys harmful to children, private member's bill backers say

BY SARAH SCHMIDT

Health professionals and opposition politicians joined forces yesterday to promote a bill to ban toys that are so loud they could be causing permanent hearing loss in children.

The current rule in Canada allows toys as loud as 100 decibels, comparable to the sound of a lawn mower or a motorcycle and not far off a sandblaster or a rock concert, estimated to be 115 decibels.

Judy Wasylycia-Leis, health critic for the New Democrats, tabled a private member's bill yesterday to lower the permissible noise level in children's toys to 75 decibels, the safety limit recognized by the World Health Organization.

All toys above this noise threshold would be banned under the Hazardous Products Act, which Ms. Wasylycia-Leis characterized as "antiquated and out of date and harmful to kids.

"We are actually damaging kids' hearing at the precise moment when you can have the most impact in terms of the development of their hearing. Who would have thought a toy, when turned on and put close to your ear, can be damaging? I don't think many parents know this, and the toy companies clearly are not going to do it on their own."

During a news conference yesterday, Ms. Wasylycia-Leis showcased a few toys that exceed 100 decibels when held close to the ear, common when children play with toys. The singing stuffed animal, Beach Bunny, registered at 106 decibels and a plastic power tool clocked in at 101dB.

Ondina Love, executive director of the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, said the consensus among experts was that the current limit was "too high." She said the proposal to reduce the noise threshold to 75 decibels would lead "to the protection of the hearing health of millions of children."

Researchers have found that the inner ear of a child is more sensitive to noise and may be susceptible to hearing loss for noise exposures that are safe for adults.

Health Minister Tony Clement's office said the ministry was planning a review of its test methods and the 100 decibel limit "in light of recent developments in recognized international toy safety standards relating to safe sound limits for toys."

In the meantime, the legislated limit in Canada will be actively enforced.

Last month, a Grade 8 student in Vancouver tested 33

### HOW LOUD IS TOO LOUD?

A sampling of decibel levels.

Normal conversation	70dB
Alarm clock	80dB
Screaming child	90dB
Lawnmower	100dB
Snowmobile	100dB
Motorcycle	100dB
Chain saw	110dB
Sandblasting	115dB
Rock concert	115dB
Gunshot blast	140dB

**Sources:** audiologist Marshall Chasin, Musicians Clinic of Canada; psychologist Michael Forrester, University of Kent; audiologist William Clark, Central Institute for the Deaf.

toys for young children to determine whether the noise levels exceeded the 100-decibel limit, using the method employed by Health Canada's Product Safety Laboratory. The science project, titled Toxic Tones in Toys, found all toys were below the limit when held at arm's length, but one-half exceeded 100 decibels when held close to the ear.

The most recent available data, results of Health Canada's 2005-06 Product Safety Program, found only one of 24 toys tested at its product safety lab exceeded the 100dB limit when held at arm's length.