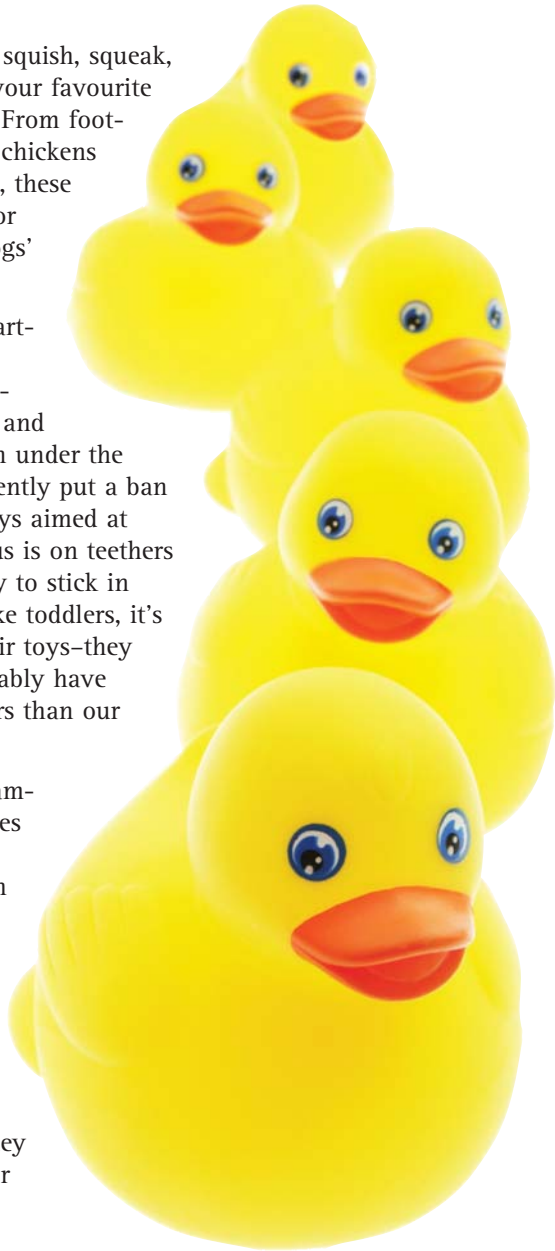


# Toxic Toys

**W**e love toys! They squish, squeak, bounce and line your favourite pet store shelves. From footballs, hedgehogs, chickens and fake looking T-bone steaks, these colourful plastic toys are just for fun. But could some of your dogs' toys be toxic lollipops?

That's a question that is just starting to be asked in the United States. So let's look to the questions being asked about plastic and vinyl toys for tiny tots—children under the age of three. San Francisco recently put a ban on the sale of certain plastic toys aimed at children under three. Their focus is on teething and toys that children are likely to stick in one place—their mouths. Just like toddlers, it's the one place our dog's put their toys—they suck, chew and shred and probably have exposure to them for more years than our children do.

The controversy centers on a family of chemicals called phthalates (pronounced 'thalates'), which are used to soften vinyl, and on bisphenol A (BPA), a substance used to make clear and shatterproof plastic. Over the past decade, scientific research has shown that the chemical in question, DINP (Diisononyl Phthalate), can be toxic to lab animals, causing liver and kidney damage and incidence of cancer in higher levels of exposure.



Cats are wonderful, lithe creatures that seemingly have springs in their feet with their ability to leap to tall objects in a single bound. So how do you keep them off your kitchen counter tops?

- Make your kitchen counter top an unattractive, smelling place for your cat (whilst still being hygienic and pleasant smelling to you) by using a citrus-based smelling cleaning agent.
- Avoid leaving food items on kitchen counters so that cats won't see this area as their own personal smorgasbord.
- Make sure that your cat has other places to climb so that the kitchen bench is not her only vertical challenge. Climbing frames positioned by a window, providing a perch with a view, may divert attention from the counters.
- Make 'safe' booby traps on the kitchen bench top to deter cat counter surfing. A simple mouse-trap that is set under a couple of layers of newspaper makes a jumping and snapping noise and both actions can be an effective deterrent. Cover your counter in cling wrap—cats hate the feeling under their paws. There are other commercial products that emit nasty noises when they sense motion.

Although cats are very 'clean' pets, it's not very hygienic to have them wandering at will over the very areas you prepare food.

## Keeping Kitty off the Counter

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The European Union has banned some chemicals in toys since 1999 and in 1998 Health Canada issued an advisory warning about the 'mouthing' of soft plastic toys by children. Environmentalists have long argued that these chemicals can leach out and be harmful to children.

These toys have also been linked to Hemangiosarcoma which is a rare, rapidly growing, highly invasive variety of cancer. One of our readers, Natasha Schickerling, from Melbourne, recently had to put her dog down after he got sick suddenly. As Natasha explains, "My beautiful Border, Kelpie, Shepard had to be put to sleep after an exploratory operation revealed he was suffering from this type of cancer. This PVC cancer the most likely cause. My dog, Squid, probably sucked in those chemicals for two hours a day over eight years. I used to buy fresh ones for him regularly."

So being that there are no safety standards in place for pet toys, it may be worthwhile to consider the types of toys you readily give your toy obsessed, slobbering pooch. Perhaps instead of the squeaky steak, look for rope or fabric toys or the ones that have latex and natural rubber in them. Who would have thought that playtime could be serious stuff.