

Your Rubik's Cube might not be as good for you as you think

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A puzzle toy designed to exercise the mind, ironically, contains chemical contaminants that can damage the nervous system and reduce intellectual capacity, a new global study has found.

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South African environmental justice NGO, groundWork purchased nine Rubik Cubes and sent them for analysis to the Czech Republic to be part of the global study, in conjunction with global civil society network IPEN and environmental organisation Arnika. The toys were all manufactured in China.

Three samples were chosen for laboratory tests.

The analysis found that all three samples contained Octabromodiphenyl (OctaBDE) and Decabromodiphenyl (DecaBDE) at elevated concentrations. One of the samples also contained Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD) at concentration, the organisation said.

All three tested cubes purchased in South Africa exceeded safe limits.

"These chemicals are persistent and known to harm the reproductive system and disrupt hormone systems, adversely impacting intelligence, attention, learning and memory," groundWork said this week.

The toxic chemicals are used in the plastic casings of electronic products and if they are not removed, they are carried into new products when the plastic is recycled. Ninety percent of the samples surveyed contained OctaBDE or DecaBDE. More than 40% contained HBCD.

"The difficulty is that most people are not aware that their child's toys may have these harmful substances in them. This is a serious issue that needs to be resolved nationally and globally," said groundWork's Niven Reddy.

groundWork said the study emerges just a few days before the global conference of the parties to the Stockholm Convention will decide whether to continue allowing the recycling of materials containing OctaBDE and possibly make a new recycling exemption for DecaBDE.

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The treaty's expert committee has warned against the practice.

"Recycling materials that contain toxic chemicals contaminates new products, continues exposure, and undermines the credibility of recycling," said IPEN's Joe DiGangi.

Arnika's Jitka Strakova said protective hazardous waste limits were needed.

"Weak standards mean toxic products and dirty recycling, which often takes place in low and middle income countries and spreads poisons from recycling sites into our homes and bodies."

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