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Ban Sought on Dangerous Novelty Lighters

United States Senate

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Wyden, Collins, Dodd Seek Ban on Dangerous Novelty Lighters, Toy look-a-likes cause severe injuries and death to children

WASHINGTON, DC - Responding to calls from fire prevention and child safety groups across the country, U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), and Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) today introduced the "Protect Children from Dangerous Lighters Act" legislation banning cigarette lighters constructed to look like toys or regular household items. Commonly referred to as "novelty lighters," the toy-like devices, which naturally appeal to small children, have been the cause of deadly fires across the country.

"Because they are so well disguised as toys, novelty lighters have children literally playing with fire," said Wyden. "A nationwide ban, which is supported by fire fighters and consumer groups alike, is the best way to keep these dangerous products out of the hands of youngsters."

Senator Collins said, "Novelty lighters can be deadly to young children and should be banned. While Maine is among states that have already approved such a ban, the ban should be nationwide. This is commonsense legislation that could help prevent additional injury and death of children resulting from lighters that look like toys or other items."

"While they may appear to be harmless toys, novelty lighters can be incredibly dangerous to young children," Dodd said. "I am proud to join Senators Wyden and Collins in introducing this legislation to ensure that no family is forced to face a tragedy because an innocent child confused a lighter for a toy."

The lighters have caused tragic accidents across the country. In Oregon, one boy died and another sustained permanent brain damage after the two played with a novelty lighter shaped like a dolphin. A lighter shaped like a cell phone caused second degree burns to a young boy in North Carolina. In Arkansas, a two year old and 15-month old died in a fire they accidentally started by playing with a lighter shaped like a toy motorcycle.

The ban would require the Consumer Product Safety Commission to treat novelty lighters as a banned hazardous substance which would prohibit the manufacture, importation, or sale of the lighters anywhere in the country. Currently the lighters are easily purchased in convenience stores in many states, though Maine and Tennessee have passed novelty lighter ban legislation and similar bans are being introduced in other states, including Oregon. A ban is also in place in the European Union.

A federal ban is supported by fire-fighting and consumer and child safety groups including the National Association of Fire Marshals, the Congressional Fire Institute, Safe Kids USA, the Consumer's Union, and the Consumer Federation of America. In addition, the ban is supported by the cigarette lighter industry, represented by the Lighter Association. Novelty lighters are largely imported from China.

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