

Primer: Asbestos in Play Sand and Toys 2025-26

by Laurie Kazan-Allen

In November & December 2025, urgent recalls were issued in Australia & New Zealand after tremolite and chrysotile asbestos contamination had been found in toys imported from China. The affected products were sensory play sand, craft sand and kinetic sand.¹



After a January 2026 article appeared in The Guardian reporting asbestos contamination in a craft set sold by Hobbycraft,² dozens of children's products were recalled due to contamination in the UK and other European countries.

The toxic products included: colored sand, sand pictures, sand playsets products and stretchy figurines.

¹ Kazan-Allen, L. *Toxic Toys Create Global Outrage*. November 21, 2025

<https://ibasecretariat.org/lka-toxic-toys-create-global-outrage.php>

Alford, B. *The Sand Problem Goes Global: How Australia and New Zealand Forced the World to Pay Attention*. March 3, 2026.

<https://ibasecretariat.org/ba-sand-problem-goes-global-how-australia-and-new-zealand-forced-the-world-to-pay-attention.php>

² Tims, A. *Asbestos found in children's play sand sold in UK*. January 24, 2026.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2026/jan/24/childrens-play-sand-hobbycraft-asbestos-removed-recall>
The Hobbycraft Giant Box of Craft (2601-0364). January 27, 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls/product-recall-hobbycraft-giant-box-of-craft-2601-0364>

Featured alerts and recalls



From what I have found out, the UK's Office of Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) has little or no testing capacity – recalls are based on self-reports from importing companies or manufacturers. There is no publicly available information about the level of contamination in the products recalled in the UK. A German newspaper article, however, said that in samples of blue sand, contamination of up to 5% tremolite asbestos and up to 5% chrysotile asbestos had been found.³

According to information on the OPSS website, consumers in possession of recalled products were advised to:

- “Stop using the product immediately.
- If the toy is undamaged, **place in a heavy-duty plastic bag, double tape it securely, label it clearly and store in a secure location** out of the reach of children.

³ Metzger, R. et al. *Deko-, Spiel- und Bastelsand. Tabelle: Die geprüften Produkte* [Decorative, play and craft sand. Table: The tested products]. April 2, 2026.

<https://www.test.de/Deko-Spiel-und-Bastelsand-Asbest-Alarm-in-Sandprodukten-6288341-6288345/>

According to a German consumer testing organization: “A mass fraction of 5 percent means that 100 grams of sand contain approximately 5 grams of asbestos – an amount that can contain many millions of individual asbestos fibers. Even the seemingly small fraction of less than 1 percent still corresponds to millions of fibers in a standard package.”

<https://www.cleankids.de/2026/03/24/produkttest/stiftung-warentest-warnt-asbest-in-spielsand-gefahr-fuer-kinder/93849/>

Pursuant to UK regulations, construction and demolition waste that contains more than 0.1% asbestos by weight is classified as hazardous (or special) waste. Material, including soil or debris, “containing above this concentration, or showing visible asbestos debris, must be handled, transported, and disposed of according to strict hazardous waste regulations.”

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/em9.pdf>

- If the toy is damaged and the sand inside is accessible, clean up sites where the product was used using wet cloths to avoid generating dust. Wear gloves and a mask. Double bag the sand, gloves, mask and cloths.
- Keep children and other people away from areas where the sand has been used until the area has been cleaned.
- **Dispose of the product in your general household waste, or return to store where specified by the retailer, who will provide a full refund.**
- For further information, or questions, contact the retailer you purchased from.”

MY CONCERNS

I can well imagine the fury and impatience of a parent who discovered that not only had her child been playing with sand that contained a deadly carcinogen but that it had been spread all over their home. I have serious doubts that she would follow the instructions and carefully “place in a heavy-duty plastic bag, double tape it securely.”⁴ Even if she did, it is my belief that dumping it in the household waste and/or returning it to the shop puts dustbin collectors and/or shopworkers at risk. Not to mention, of course, the postal workers who process and deliver the parcels containing the toxic toys.

This issue was raised on April 15, 2026 during a two-hour seminar held by the Parliamentary Asbestos Sub-group. Michael Phillips, Chair of the TUC’s Asbestos Committee, undertook to follow up with his trade union colleagues and politicians.

April 17, 2026

⁴ Kazan-Allen, L. *Global Challenges, National Responses*. March 5, 2026.
<https://ibasecretariat.org/lka-global-challenges-national-responses.php>