



NUMEROUS CHINESE TOY RECALLS, SO WHO IS REALLY TO BLAME.

In its quest for lower and lower priced imports it was inevitable that the US would fall victim to Chinese companies who would attempt to cut corners to deliver these products to our shores at prices we would find palatable. Our mantra "Cheaper is better" might be coming back to haunt us as our offshore manufacturing partners search for the means to shave tenths of pennies from already staggeringly low prices. In lands where finished goods often sell for less than we can purchase the underlying commodities (the paper and paint etc.) much of this magic may soon be exposed for what it is - cutting corners and outright cheating, often to enhance profits, while often just to stay in business.

But the finger should not be pointed squarely in the direction of Asia. All the parties must look past the greedy motives and reach a solution that benefits everyone, from workers, to manufacturer, through wholesale and retail channels, and ultimately to the consumer. United States importers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers should take a long hard look up and down the supply chain and understand that everyone must profit fairly so that a balance can be maintained that is sustainable for the long term. And this includes the factory worker who is often overworked, is underpaid, is often exposed to toxins, and is forced to live in filthy conditions of poverty and squalor.

In the wake of recent recalls due to "lead-based" paints and serious design flaws, David Chiu, chairman of the Hong Kong Small and Medium Enterprise Progress and Investment Association, urged international importers to throw Chinese manufacturers a lifeline by not demanding the lowest price for their goods. The recent scandal involving tainted paint used in the manufacture of Mattel toys and the tragic death of Cheung Shu-hung, who committed suicide after the scandal broke, has brought sharp focus on the issues of quality control and safety standards, and has cast a questioning spotlight on "Cheaper is better".

But today's events are yet another stark reminder that history repeats itself, as those who remember the Japanese production boom after shock waves from the second world war had subsided can attest to. In the 1950s and 1960s the Japanese were well known for pumping out extraordinary numbers of inexpensive goods, and "made in Japan" was equated with "inferior quality" and sometimes even with "hazardous to your health". As the Japanese economic situation matured and lifestyles improved, so did manufacturing quality. Today the Japanese produce many of the world's finest quality goods, albeit with a slightly higher price tag. Perhaps this should remind us all that ultimately "You get what you pay for".

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