

Are glow sticks poisonous to dogs? Our new puppy found one in our son's bedroom and chewed it up. That night he vomited several times but was better by the next morning.

As you have found out the hard way, puppies have to be constantly supervised no matter how well you think you have puppy-proofed your house. They have a way of finding either your most expensive pair of shoes or the most dangerous household item to chew on. Chewing on a glow stick can have harmful effects. The dog's mouth, skin and eyes will become irritated as the fluid inside the stick leaks out. He may vomit, gag or salivate quite a bit as the toxic liquid is swallowed. The material in the stick is a type of chemical known as a phthalate, which is also used in many other products.

Phthalates are incorporated in the manufacturing of vinyl products to soften them. Toxicological testing done on animals over the last several years has shown exposure to phthalates causes developmental problems in the young, as well as liver, kidney and reproductive organ damage. Unborn babies can be affected if their mother is exposed and newborns can be affected through their mother's milk. If you have vinyl toys, flooring and other items made of vinyl in the house, the phthalates gradually leak out into the air of the house and can be inhaled. If your dog chews on a vinyl object, it is even worse as the crushing action on the vinyl, as well as saliva and heat of the mouth speed the release of the chemicals. Results of these studies have caused many countries as well as the European Union to issue warnings and enact laws against the use of these chemicals in the manufacture of children's toys and other products. The U.S. so far has not joined them, except for the state of California. Laws to prevent the use of vinyl for animal products hopefully will follow.

Until that time, pet owners should take the necessary precautions to not buy anything made of vinyl for their dog or cat to play with, sleep in, or wear. If the label doesn't indicate that a product is made of vinyl or PVC, smell it. Vinyl has a strong, distinctive odor and airing it out doesn't solve the problem. Don't believe package labels that say "non-toxic vinyl". There are many high quality American toy companies that produce toys without vinyl. If you need a suggestion, let me know. We are all well-educated about avoiding bisphenol-A in plastic and vinyl products, now we need to add phthalates to the list of toxic chemicals to avoid.

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