



WHY BAN THE SALE AND DISTRIBUTION OF NOVELTY OR TOY-LIKE LIGHTERS?



Senate Bill 766 prohibiting the sale and distribution of novelty toy-like lighters was introduced strictly as a public safety concern, to protect the most vulnerable citizens of our state...our children. Most often these children are under the age of 5.

Children playing with lighters continue to be a major safety concern. Nationally, almost 50 percent of the fires involving children in residential structure fires were related to children playing with lighters. In South Carolina, that figure is approximately 35 percent.

Novelty lighters can easily be mistaken for toys, making them an even greater risk of ending up in the wrong hands. These lighters can take the form of animals, rubber ducks, miniature cars, guns and tools, to name a few. Many of them have lights, visual effects and sounds, making them even more attractive to children.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has issued recalls on millions of novelty lighters because they do not have any child resistant mechanisms as required by the CPSC. These recalls were conducted to prevent possible injury.

Over 70 million novelty lighters are imported into the United States annually. With the European Union banning the sale of novelty lighters in March 2007, millions more of these lighters will likely be for sale in the United States.

A word of caution: Children are not the consumers of novelty lighters, adults are. But, because these lighters are manufactured to look like toys, they are a magnet for small hands to explore.

The concern that this piece of legislation prohibiting adults from purchasing something that is legal is understandable. However, the law is justifiable in that it is the responsibility of public servants to protect the health and safety of all citizens, sometimes placing limitations on the general public. Banning the sale of novelty toy-like lighters to only minors would defeat the intent and spirit of the legislation, as children are not the ones purchasing such items. These devices are purchased by adults and then made accessible to children.

The proposed ban on the Novelty Toy-Like Lighter Bill is similar to the ban on the sale of other items which present a degree of danger to the consumer and general public. Merchandise such as child cribs, car seats, toys with lead paint, children's garments, heaters and electrical and gas equipment that have shown signs of mechanical failure or design flaws have been recalled and removed from the market. These items are not unlawful to possess but are illegal to sell or distribute. Novelty and toy-like lighters have been proven to cause death, injury and destruction of property.

The passage of Senate Bill 766 prohibiting the sale and distribution of toy-like novelty lighters will protect our children, community and our state's firefighters. It will certainly help make South Carolina a safer place to live, work, and play.