

Planning on giving a science or engineering activity gift this holiday season? With the viral internet sensation of GoldieBlox™ and popularity of littleBits™; science and engineering toys, such as rockets, microscopes, and chemistry sets, have regained popularity. Frankie Wood-Black, Ph.D. in Physics and a 25-year industrial professional author of “Staying Safe while Conducting Hands-On Science” says you need to remember that safety should be a key consideration when choosing the right activity.

As any group of toys expands, the complexity of choosing the perfect item for the child also increases. So, Dr. Wood-Black suggests the following tips for choosing a safe activity kit for that intrepid experimenter on your holiday gift list:

- **Look at the Age Guidelines** – Age guidelines are set based upon the developmental skills and abilities of a child at a particular age. You need to consider the specific child that you have in mind when purchasing a particular kit or activity. Also, consider the other children in the home; a science activity often becomes a group activity.
- **Read the Box or Label** – Look for key phrases such as hazard or caution. Consider these hazards and cautions as you reflect on the child for whom you are purchasing the gift. Look to see if the manufacturer is highlighting that the product is meeting either government or voluntary standards such as the Consumer Product Safety Act or ASTM F963-07, the Standard for Consumer Safety Specification for Toy Safety. (There are similar voluntary standards in Canada and elsewhere.)
- **Review/Set the Rules** – Each kit should come with safety guidelines and recommendations. Review these prior to using the product. Parents and adults may also need to set the “house” rules for use.
- **Get the Safety Gear** – With bicycles, helmets are cheap insurance. So too with the safety gear associated with these activity kits. Think about eye protection, hearing protection and appropriate clothing needed to safely perform the experiment or activity and purchase it with the kit. These recommendations should be on the box or in the information that comes with the activity. Nothing is so depressing as opening a cool science gift and not being able to do the activity right away because you don’t have the safety gear.

Parents, Grandparents, or anyone who are planning on giving a science or engineering related activity gift this year, may want to consider going online to review the particular activities’ ratings. Many product websites have additional information related to the activity or kit, suggested experiments, their safety practices and their own safety recommendations. Additional information may also be found through general non-profit organizations such as www.safekids.org or www.toyinfo.org.

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