

## Of The Earth

*Though still a niche category, 'organic' toys make important strides*

**R**ubberwood, bamboo and hand-picked organic cotton...one day, a much larger percentage of toys might be made using these earth-friendly materials. The end result is always a higher-quality kids' product, but it comes with an unavoidable price—higher mark-ups on toy shelves. For now, there are at least some manufacturers who recognize the positive environmental affects of creating toys with organic resources, despite the higher costs of production. And while they admit there are some challenges to producing better quality toys, they believe it is worth it in the end—for the environment, for their workers and for the kids who will be playing with their products in the years to come.

Plush, wooden blocks, building sets and games are just some of the toys that can be produced using natural materials, according to several "green" manufacturers who spoke to PLAYTHINGS.

Barbera Aimes, owner of ImagiPlay, the Boulder, Colo.-based manufacturer of wooden play sets, puzzles, building blocks and other educational toys, says the toy industry has an obligation to produce the best, and most natural, products as possible, in particular those for preschool-aged children.

"We all, as human beings, need to adopt a broader view of our world and our impact on it for us to survive," Aimes says. "Global warming has really brought a lot of attention to this desperately needed new awareness, and I think it has caused people to begin to question how their thoughts, words and deeds impact others." This philosophy strongly influences the way ImagiPlay manufactures its toys. Plantation-grown

rubberwood, from several factories in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, is used to produce all of its splinter-free hardwood toys, Aimes tells PLAYTHINGS.

And Imagiplay's wood is not the only earth-friendly material used in its preschool products. The company's kid-sized building blocks are made in Wisconsin with 50-percent recycled cardboard and water-based, non-toxic inks. In addition, Imagiplay has intentionally set up its warehouse near its manufacturing plant in order to cut down on the amount of fuel it uses to transport cardboard from North America to China and then back to the U.S. or Canada. "It's important that manufacturers understand this is critical, as we are the ones who are causing things to be produced that will either add needlessly to landfills, or be passed down and enjoyed by generations," Aimes says.

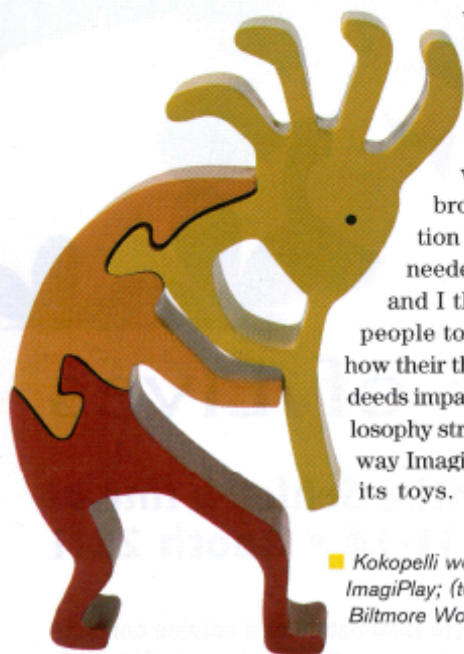
To that end, Aimes provides brochures and table tents to retailers with each shipment of ImagiPlay's products in order to promote awareness of these issues to consumers.

This year, ImagiPlay is releasing 40 new items in its Counting & Alphabet, North American Animals, Wild Animals, Trees and Sea Life lines of puzzles, as well as in its Giant Building Blocks, Little ReaderBlocks, Play Sets blocks and Wondrous Wilderness series. ImagiPlay will also debut new wooden toys and 16 new AniMates (male and female animal sets) this year, plus a new Southwest Series line of puzzles.

### Dyed and true

Aimes says rubberwood is just one of the natural raw materials she sees being used more and more in recent years to produce high-quality wooden toys. Her company is also exploring the potential uses of bamboo as well as organic cotton, a pesticide-free alternative most often found in high-end apparel.

These materials, she says, are also found in a handful of other toy products currently on the market—such as the MiYim line of plush and baby products from Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Hosung NY, which also has facilities in Ecuador and has just opened a new factory in Shanghai.



■ Kokopelli wooden block puzzle, ImagiPlay; (top) Tofu Bear, Biltmore World Trade

Earth-friendly

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