

MORE EXPLODING LITHIUM ION BATTERIES IN VEHICLES

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MORE EXPLODING LITHIUM ION

Are 'hoverboards' dangerous? Batteries have been known to explode

A hoverboard toy, the battery-powered skateboard that's likely on many Christmas wish lists this year, exploded and caused a fire that destroyed a house in Jean Lafitte, a resident told WGNO television. (WGNO television)

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In the busy holiday season, the last thing you want to worry about is whether that toy your kids begs to have is going to burn down your house. That might be why the fire that [destroyed a Jean Lafitte home](#), blamed on a "hoverboard" toy, has drawn such attention.

The explosion described by resident Jessica Home, as well as a [similar fire](#) documented on video in Gulf Shores, Ala., have received [national news media coverage](#) in the past few days. But are hoverboards -- the battery-powered skateboard-like devices that are one of this year's hottest toys -- actually dangerous?

The recent fires are still under investigation, but one culprit might be the lithium ion batteries that help power hoverboards. The batteries aren't unusual -- the same kinds power our phones, portable computers, even electric cars. Lithium ion technology represents an effort by battery-makers to create smaller, longer-lasting batteries. Millions are used every day without problems.

But there have been high-profile incidents of explosions and fires. In 2013, battery problems on Boeing airplanes ultimately [grounded the entire fleet](#) of 787 Dreamliners. Electric carmakers such as Tesla and Chevrolet [have had issues](#) with the batteries. Phones have been known to explode in people's pockets, and [e-cigarettes](#) have blown up in people's faces, causing burns.

MORE TESLA'S HAVE CAUGHT ON FIRE THAN YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD!

While problems are rare, the risk that comes with lithium ion batteries is something for consumers to consider, said Scott Wolfson, spokesman for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. The commission is investigating the hoverboard incidents in both Louisiana and Alabama, Wolfson said.

These batteries pack a lot of power into a small package." -- Scott Wolfson, Consumer Product Safety Commission

"Consumers need to appreciate that (the hoverboard) is a product that has lithium ion batteries," Wolfson said. "These are batteries that pack a lot of power into a small package, and they need to understand there's the potential for overheating."

Wolfson recommended consumers charge their hoverboards where they can keep an eye on the device, and not leave them plugged in overnight. That goes for anything with a lithium ion battery, not just hoverboards.

"We know that consumers often charge their cell phones overnight, and we advise against it," Wolfson said. "Therefore, don't take the risk with your hoverboard. Charge it at a time and a place where you can keep an eye on it."

That might not have helped in the two reported incidents. In Jean Lafitte, Home has said the hoverboard she bought for her son was plugged in for only a few minutes before it exploded. In Gulf Shores, Timothy Cade was reportedly riding his hoverboard when it caught fire.

Joan Siff, president of World Against Toys Causing Harm, which releases an [annual list of dangerous toys](#), said her organization also is looking into the issue. "At a minimum, they shouldn't be exploding," Siff said. "Consumers have a right to expect that these products they're buying are safe, especially when they're products that are going to end up in the hands of children."

The biggest risk of hoverboards might be a less explosive one: Falls. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has received 20 reports of people falling off hoverboards and being injured seriously enough to go to the emergency room. Wolfson recommends that people treat the devices like skateboards, and that means wearing a helmet and pads.

"There are incidents that have involved head trauma and significant trauma to the arm and wrist," Wolfson said. "This is a new product category. There are going to be people (who) may not be familiar with how to maintain one's balance, and therefore they should minimize the risk of injury if they do fall."

Anyone who does have trouble with a hoverboard is encouraged to report it to the safety commission at [saferproducts.gov](#). The site open to the public, so consumers may use it to research products.

- [See video from the Gulf Shores:](#)