

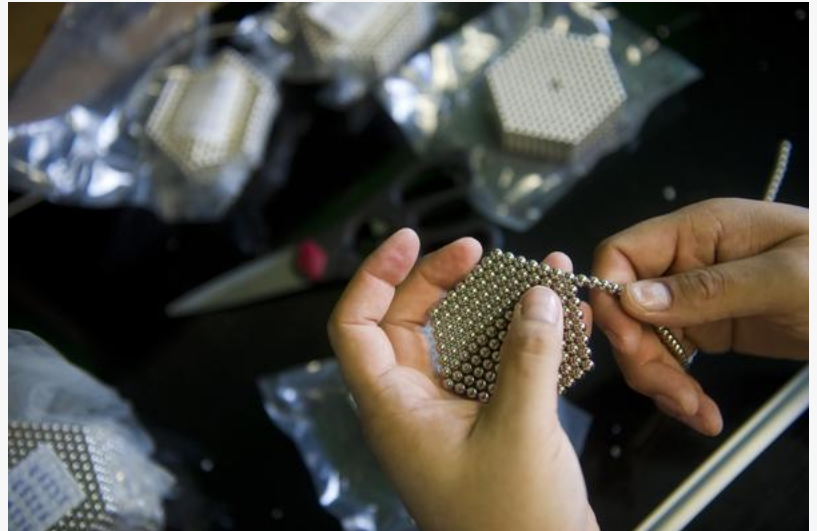
## Zen Magnets Takes On CPSC

*Zen Magnets is one of the last magnetic-ball companies still standing, thanks in part to a CPSC crackdown that eliminated Zen's major competitor, Buckyballs.*

DENVER, COLORADO, August 14, 2013 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Fighting the feds is an ordeal. But it can have fringe benefits, as well.

[Denver-based Zen Magnets](#) is one of the last magnetic-ball companies still standing, thanks in part to a federal crackdown that eliminated Zen's major U.S. competitor, Buckyballs.

Zen owner Shihan Qu knows he could be next as the Consumer Product Safety Commission pushes to ban all industry sales. Zen has refused to comply with the CPSC's order to launch a recall and discontinue sales.



Zen Magnets' 5-millimeter balls are intended to be used for molding together in geometric sculptures and artistic designs. (Grant Hindsley, The Denver Post)

“

It would be a shame to ban something that gives so much joy... The statistical likelihood of magnets causing injury is much lower than from a gun, or a knife, or even a trampoline, for goodness' sake.”

*Dean Boyd Edwards*

Business is brisk for Zen while it wages a legal skirmish with the agency.

As a dozen other magnet companies, including Buckyballs, closed their doors or agreed to stop selling, Zen Magnets has enjoyed a steady increase in business.

Sales last year were a record \$700,000 — a big jump from the \$50,000 that Zen recorded during its first year of operations in 2009.

Qu attributes the increase to a combination of factors:

customers buying because they fear a shutdown of the company, the demise of Buckyballs and an effective grassroots marketing campaign.

At issue are the 5-millimeter balls made of rare-earth metal neodymium, powerfully magnetized, that are intended to be used for molding together in geometric sculptures and artistic designs.

The safety agency reports that in a recent two-year period, ingestion of magnetic balls — mostly by young children — caused 1,700 emergency-room visits. Magnets were swallowed in some incidents after children placed them in their mouths to simulate tongue and facial piercings.

The CPSC says severe injuries can occur when swallowed balls cause intestinal tissue to bind.

"These high-powered loose magnets pose a very serious risk to small children as well as teens," said CPSC communications director Scott Wolfson.

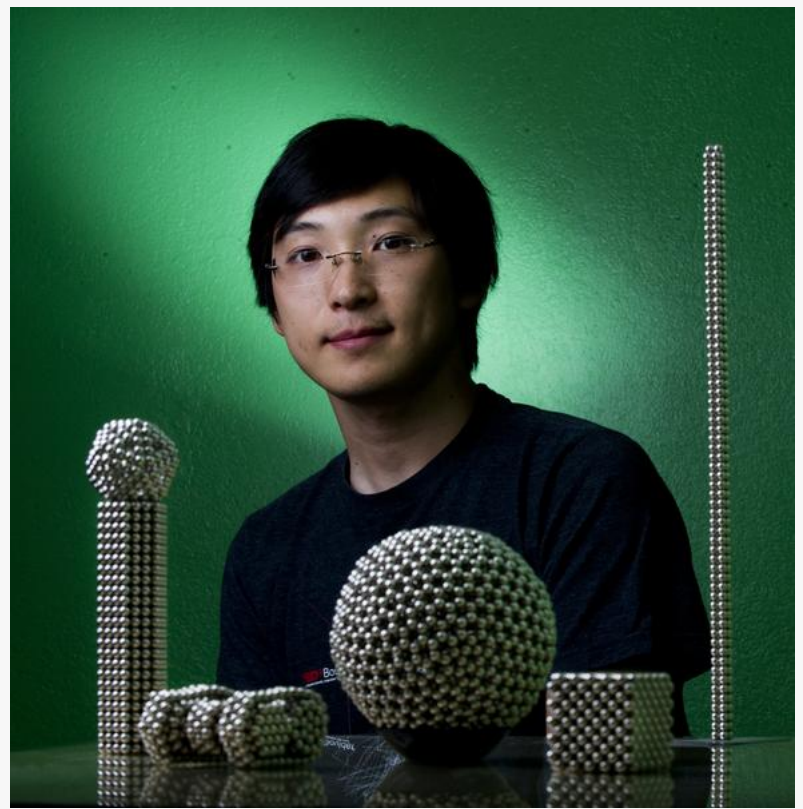
"We're trying to create a very strong and child-protective safety standard for these magnets," Wolfson said. "In the end, we're striving for a victory with a ruling that these companies need to conduct a consumer-level recall."

Qu acknowledges that injuries occur. But his company's magnets have never been linked to a documented mishap. Furthermore, he says, Zen Magnets aren't marketed as children's toys, and parents should exercise appropriate controls when kids use them.

"I want to stay in business," said Qu, a 27-year-old mechanical engineering graduate of the University of Colorado. "I feel strongly that the CPSC is doing ridiculous things. It's very apparent that the (attempted) magnetic-ball ban is unpopular with consumers."

Zen, which has retained a Denver attorney, is preparing to engage in a months-long process to fight the CPSC's lawsuit before a federal administrative law judge.

Qu spent \$4,000 to validate his position, hiring Public Policy Polling to conduct a consumer survey. [Among the results](#) from 755 respondents nationwide: Only 6 percent believe magnetic balls should be completely banned; also, 44 percent said their use is appropriate for children



Shihan Qu, owner of Zen Magnets, says his company has no reported injuries from use of the product. (Grant Hindsley, The Denver Post)

ages 8 and older.

Utah State University dean and physics professor Boyd Edwards is a fan of Zen Magnets and a supporter of Qu in his fight against the CPSC.

"It would be a shame to ban something that gives so much joy to people," he said. "The statistical likelihood of magnets causing injury is much lower than from a gun, or a knife, or even a trampoline, for goodness' sake."

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