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CPSC Votes to Develop Mandatory Safety Standards for Window Coverings to Protect Children

Commission moves forward on petition by consumer, safety groups

Washington D.C. (October 8, 2014)—Today, Parents for Window Blind Safety, Consumer Federation of America, Kids In Danger, Consumers Union, U.S. PIRG, Public Citizen, and Independent Safety Consulting, applaud the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) for voting to begin a rulemaking process to protect children from the preventable strangulation hazard posed by cords on window coverings. In May of 2013, consumer and safety groups filed a petition urging the CPSC to address the strangulation risks posed by window blind cords. Last week, CPSC staff issued a briefing package recommending that the CPSC grant the petition. Today's unanimous vote of 5 to 0 accepted CPSC's staff recommendation and begins a rulemaking process to address strangulations caused by window covering cords.

Earlier this year, in just twenty two days, four children strangled to death from cords on a window covering: a 6-year-old girl in Maryland on February 8th; a 3-year-old girl in Texas on

February 15th; a 4-year-old boy in Georgia on February 17th; and a 2-year-old boy in Maryland on March 1st. Each of these children died after the cord of a window covering strangled them. In 2014, alone, we are aware of 7 deaths and 1 serious injury. These tragic incidents contribute to the already long list of 285 deaths and serious injuries caused by these products between 1996 and 2012. CPSC staff also estimates that from 1996 through 2012, 1,590 children received treatment for injuries resulting from entanglements on window covering cords.

“Today’s vote represents a bittersweet victory, not just for my husband and me, but for the countless other parents whose children have died or been critically injured by corded window coverings,” stated Erica Thomas. Erica and Stephen Thomas were parents of two-year-old Cormac Thomas who passed away in March due to asphyxiation from a window covering cord. “While nothing assuages the anguish of losing a child in such a senseless manner, we are sincerely encouraged that the CPSC has taken this step toward preventing our tragedy from happening to another family.”

The CPSC documents that an average of 11 children die and 6 children suffer injuries, including serious injuries such as permanent brain injuries, from strangling in loops formed from the cords on window coverings each year. The rate of injuries and deaths has not been significantly reduced since 1983,¹ despite six industry attempts at developing voluntary standards.

“I have waited for this moment for 12 long years,” said Linda Kaiser, founder and president of Parents for Window Blind Safety. Linda Kaiser and her husband Matt formed Parents for Window Blind Safety in 2002, after their daughter, Cheyenne Rose, died as a result of being strangled by a window blind cord. “CPSC has finally answered the cries of hundreds of parents who have lost children throughout the years. We can only hope that this petition continues to move forward in order to save the countless lives of those who are still at risk.”

Parents for Window Blind Safety produced the PSA, “*In An Instant*,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMLdE0jAM1A> which captures the common window covering accident scenario. Accidents happen to the most vigilant parents while they are engaging in normal everyday activities such as preparing dinner, doing laundry, cleaning, and napping. Accidents also happen when compliant safety devices fail or when kids reach cords in cleats.

Due to the consistent death rate, the failure of the voluntary standards to address the hazard, and the existence of products and technology in the marketplace that can prevent this hazard, Consumer Federation of America, Parents for Window Blind Safety, Kids In Danger, Consumers Union, Independent Safety Consulting, U.S. PIRG, Public Citizen and other organizations filed a petition with CPSC on May 23, 2013, requesting that the CPSC promulgate a mandatory standard that prohibits hazardous accessible operating cords on window coverings. The petition documented the failure of industry to rein in this hazard despite their knowledge since 1983 that infants and young children were strangling on accessible window covering cords at a rate of 1 or more per month. Furthermore, the voluntary standards process, starting from the first standard in 1996 and including the most recent standard in 2012, has repeatedly failed to eliminate or even significantly reduce the risk of strangulation and asphyxiation by window covering cords to

¹ CFA 2011 Press Release. <http://www.consumerfed.org/pdfs/WindowCoveringsStandardPressRelease.pdf>

young children. As a result, future generations of children continue to be at risk of strangling on household window cords.

“Today’s important vote by CPSC confirms that the voluntary standard has failed American consumers and paves the way for a strong mandatory standard that protects children from this hazard,” stated Rachel Weintraub, legislative director and senior counsel at Consumer Federation of America. “We applaud CPSC’s critically important decision to protect children from the strangulation risk posed to children by cords on window coverings. I look forward to the day that families no longer suffer as a result of injuries and deaths caused by these cords.”

Ellen Bloom, director of federal policy and the Washington Office of Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports, said, "This is a big step forward in this process to ensure window coverings are safer and tragedies are prevented. Consumer Reports has reported extensively on the strangulation risks of window cords, and we're very pleased that the CPSC has voted to move forward on our groups' petition."

“CPSC took an important step today in moving towards safety in window coverings. Countless lives will be saved,” stated Nancy Cowles, executive director of Kids In Danger.

The CPSC has long recognized window covering cords as a hidden strangulation and asphyxiation hazard to children and continues to identify it on its website as one of the “top five hidden hazards in the home.”

“U.S. PIRG commends the CPSC for moving forward on this important rule to protect kids,” said Ed Mierzewski, Consumer Program Director of U.S. PIRG.

“We are pleased that the CPSC will initiate the rulemaking process to tackle window coverings with cords, one of the top five hidden hazards in the home,” said Christine Hines, Consumer and Civil Justice Counsel, Public Citizen. “We urge the agency to issue a strong rule that will eliminate the life-threatening risks that these cords pose to children.”

Significantly, products and technology already on the market can protect children. Window coverings that eliminate accessible, hazardous cords are available, add minimum costs to the manufacturing of blinds, and can be used on the vast majority of blinds and shades. In addition, designs that render the pull cords of window coverings inaccessible have been available since the 1990’s but were never sold in the marketplace because the CPSC allowed separated cord tassels to serve as a compliant design.

“Despite the fact that the technology to eliminate dangerous cords has existed for more than a decade, the WCMA has been relentless in their refusal to change their standard voluntarily. By granting this petition, the CPSC demonstrates that industry’s chances to get it right on their own have finally run out,” stated Carol Pollack-Nelson, Ph.D. of Independent Safety Consulting.

Consumer Federation of America is an association of nearly 300 nonprofit consumer organizations that was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, advocacy, and education.
www.consumerfed.org

Parents for Window Blind Safety is a non profit organization that supports parents whose children have been seriously injured or killed by dangerous cords, educates consumers about the dangers of accessible window covering cords in homes, daycare facilities, and military housing, helps create safer standards in the industry, encourages innovation of safer products in the industry, and tests window covering products for safety.
www.parentsforwindowblindsafety.org

Kids In Danger (KID) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting children by improving children's product safety. KID was founded in 1998 by the parents of sixteen-month-old Danny Keysar who died in his Chicago childcare home when a portable crib collapsed around his neck. www.KidsInDanger.org

Consumers Union is the public policy and advocacy division of Consumer Reports. Consumers Union works for a fair, just, and safe marketplace for all consumers, and to empower consumers to protect themselves, in the areas of telecommunications reform, health reform, food and product safety, financial reform, and other consumer issues. Consumer Reports is the world's largest independent product-testing organization. Using its more than 50 labs, auto test center, and survey research center, the nonprofit rates thousands of products and services annually. Founded in 1936, Consumer Reports has over 8 million subscribers to its magazine, website, and other publications.
www.consumersunion.org

U.S. PIRG is the federation of state Public Interest Research Groups. PIRGs are non-profit, non-partisan organizations that take on powerful interests on behalf of their members. www.uspirg.org

Public Citizen is a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization representing consumer interests in Congress, the executive branch and the courts. www.citizen.org