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Four Children Killed by Window Covering Cords in Three Weeks

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Must Take Action to Protect Children

Washington D.C.—Today, Parents for Window Blind Safety, Consumer Federation of America, and Independent Safety Consulting, called on the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to take effective action to protect children from the preventable strangulation hazard posed by cords on window coverings in light of four children's deaths in three weeks.

In 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. These most recent tragic incidents contribute to the already long list of 293 deaths and serious injuries caused by these products between 1996 and 2012.

The CPSC documents that since 1983, 12 children die each year from strangling in loops formed from the cords on window coverings. The rate of injuries and deaths has not been significantly reduced since 1983,¹ despite six industry attempts at developing adequate voluntary standards.

“It is time for CPSC to take action to protect children from the hazards posed by cords on window coverings. Every day the Commission does not act, children are put at risk. Four children dying in three weeks is tragic, unacceptable and preventable,” stated 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.

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

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

Union, Independent Safety Consulting 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 failed to eliminate or even significantly reduce the risk of strangulation and asphyxiation by window covering cords to children. As a result, future generations of children are at risk of strangling on household window cords.

“A strong mandatory standard by the CPSC is necessary to protect children. For almost 20 years, the voluntary standard has failed to address the strangulation posed to children. In light of the history of the voluntary standard, the documented and persistent hazard that cords on window coverings pose to children, and these recent deaths, it is time for CPSC to act,” stated Rachel Weintraub, legislative director and senior counsel at Consumer Federation of America.

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.”

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.

“A mandatory standard that eliminates hazardous, accessible cords is necessary to protect children from strangulation. Further, a mandatory standard levels the playing field for manufacturers, in terms of costs. Without such a standard, future generations of children will continue to perish and the small, innovative manufacturers who have invested the time and money to develop safe window coverings will go out of business and stop producing these products leaving consumers without safer alternatives,” stated Carol Pollack-Nelson, Ph.D. of Independent Safety Consulting.

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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.

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.