

The Real Myths and Facts about Window Covering Safety

Myth: A standard cannot be developed to eliminate the strangulation risk posed by window coverings.

Fact: It is entirely possible for a standard to be developed that eliminates the strangulation hazards posed by window coverings. This is evidenced by the fact that manufacturers have been selling products for several years that eliminate the strangulation hazard. Clearly, the technology already exists to address the hazard.

Myth: There is no universal technologic fix for all window coverings so strangulation issues cannot be addressed by the voluntary standard.

Fact: Different solutions can be applied to different products. As noted above, the technology to eliminate cords on window coverings already exists. Fixes for stock products exist and custom products are being sold in large retail stores today and several manufacturers offer cordless window coverings.

The real culprit is money. Manufacturers don't want significant changes to the voluntary standard because that would eliminate some (not all) of their product lines, thereby affecting their bottom line.

Myth: There is nothing more WCMA could do to eliminate the strangulation risk window coverings pose to children.

Fact: All WCMA has to do to eliminate or significantly reduce the risk of strangulation is to develop a standard that does not allow accessible, long cords. In other words, they simply need to develop a standard that keeps up with the products in the marketplace. However, as their latest draft of the voluntary standard demonstrates, the WCMA standard allows proliferation of the least safe products on the market instead of drafting the standard to the safest products currently feasible and available.

Myth: It is not true that 497 children have been killed or seriously injured by accessible cords on window coverings since 1983. The rate of injuries and deaths has been reduced since 1983.

Facts: Sadly, it is true that 497 children have been killed or injured by window coverings.¹ While WCMA only acknowledges the 250 deaths from 1990 to 2010, the fatality data dates back to 1983 and since that time, there has been a total 497 deaths and injuries.

¹ Deaths and injuries have been carefully compiled by PFWBS

Also, while WCMA claims that from 2007-2010 the average accident rate had dropped to 8 incidents a year. According to CPSC data,² from 2004-2010, there have been 147 incidents. This averages 21 incidents per year.

Myth: It is not true that one child per month is killed by a corded window blind.

Fact: In fact, it is true that on average, one child has died every month for the last 27 years as a result of being strangled by a corded window blind. Using the same database that WCMA relies upon, 250 divided by 20 years is 12.5 per year. Thus, the average death rate of 12 per year is proven by data that even WCMA relies upon from CPSC.

Myth: Educational campaigns are the answer to hazards posed by window coverings and window coverings are perfectly safe when used as directed.

Fact: Educational campaigns attempt to spread the word about dangerous corded window coverings; however, some people miss the message. In other words, educational campaigns are a “safety net,” but a net has holes. Educational campaigns do not capture consumers who do not read magazine ads and those who do not happen to be listening to the news during the 1-2 minute segment when window blind strangulation is discussed.

Furthermore, WCMA’s educational campaign fails to tell consumers that corded window coverings cannot be installed and safely used in homes with children since even blinds that meet their standard – in particular, those with long cords – can and have killed children. The core message – corded blinds are not safe for homes with children – is not found on product packaging which is the place a consumer may look for information at the time of purchase.

The fact that children continue to die at the same rate they died 20 years ago proves that these educational campaigns are not working effectively.

Myth: The WCMA Standard is the most stringent in the world and the latest proposed revision to those standards goes even further in minimizing potential risk.

Fact: Boasting that safety standards are the most stringent in the world does not mean that the standard effectively addresses the strangulation hazard, does not make window coverings in the United States safe, nor does it mean that the standard cannot be strengthened. WCMA’s “revised” standard makes only nominal changes (i.e., to warning labels and a durability test for tension devices) but products designed to meet

² Available on the web at <http://parentsforwindowblindsafety.org/pdf/accidents2004-2010.pdf>.

this standard – and similar, past versions of the standard - have killed children and will certainly continue to do so.

Any significant changes that would actually lessen the risk of strangulation are omitted. Most notably, the revised WCMA standard permits long cords that can wrap around a child’s neck. Long cords can and have caused strangulation. In fact, 98 out of 125 incidents in the last 5 years were on long cords.

Thus, window coverings that comply with WCMA’s “most stringent standard in the world” can strangle children. This fact alone nullifies the notion that the revised standard has any practical significance in terms of potentially reducing the strangulation risk.

Myth: 80 percent of reported fatalities on window coverings involve older products that do not meet current safety standards.

Fact: CPSC data does not support this statement. While CPSC data shows that at least 1 child *continues to strangle* each month as a result of corded window blinds, WCMA does not use all of the CPSC data in their own accounting which explains why they state that the number of strangulation events is decreasing and that strangulations occur on older products.

In fact, WCMA only counts fatal strangulations; they discount strangulation incidents that were not fatal, including those that left children with permanent brain injuries. Additionally, their data set does not include CPSC In-Depth Investigation (IDI) reports that do not include pictures. Furthermore, fatality reports that are entered into CPSC’s data system after December of a given year are not counted and included in WCMA’s data set.

Myth: The voluntary standard process was fully open to consumer group participation and was transparent.

Fact: Consumer groups were allowed only limited involvement in the voluntary standards process. They were not permitted to participate in technical committees; technical committees are entirely comprised of industry members.

Consumer groups were allowed to serve on a “steering committee”. However, concerns and comments raised in “steering committee” meetings were ignored and suggestions made by Consumer group members were not incorporated into any aspect of the voluntary standard. Recognizing that their limited participation was for show, consumer groups withdrew from the process rather than continue to lend legitimacy to a highly flawed process.

As for transparency of the voluntary standard process, this was also lacking. WCMA withheld test data from the steering committee; WCMA removed a performance requirement for operational cords from a draft version of the standard; and consumer and industry members wanting to serve on technical committees and steering committees were denied inclusion by WCMA.