



BLIND MANUFACTURERS'
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

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Product Safety Review
Competition & Consumer Policy Division
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Submission: Review of The Australian Consumer Product Safety System

Dear Sir,

The Blind Manufacturers Association of Australia is a professional Association of most of the major blind manufacturers in Australia. Many of our members manufacture for the whole Australian market, trade across state boundaries as well as export. Recently we have been heavily involved specifically in the matter of Child Safety, especially as to the deaths of small children by strangulation caused by loops in the cords of window furnishings.

Attached are recommendations we prepared recently when requested by the Attorney General of the State of Victoria to assist him in relation to the above matter. (See Appendix A.)

Because of the lateness of our becoming aware of your Review we have taken the liberty to use these recommendations to extract the principles we would like you to consider.

Before we made our recommendations on the deaths of small children by accidental strangulation with the loop of a piece of window furnishing, our Association examined the facts as supplied in Coroners reports, as well as descriptions of cases supplied to us previously by MUNCCI (Monash University National Centre for Coronial Information):

The facts relating to all the cases we have read so far and as we understand them were:

1. All children who died were under four years of age, most were less than two.
2. All of these cases occurred in the home, either in a bedroom, lounge / family room.
3. In no case was an adult present at the time of the tragedy, even though adults were present in the house.
4. The cases occurred when the window furnishing cord loop was accessible to the child by either being too close to the ground, cot, bed, lounge or cupboard.
5. Almost every type of window furnishing was involved.
6. Pulling out the suspension cord of a venetian blind or pleated shade is a significant problem, especially in the USA.
7. The number of child deaths caused by misadventure involving window furnishing loops in Australia is small compared with some other causes of infant deaths , yet the number is significant and every effort should be made attempts to reduce the likelihood of future tragedies.

We therefore request that you consider the following where relevant:

1. That in all cases, you look at the facts that are available.
*In the case of child deaths due to strangulation we tried to look at the number of cases and the facts surrounding those cases to determine whether there was a real problem, whether these cases were infrequent, even random.
Given this information we then attempted to analyse what we could best do to make our products safer.*
2. That in all cases we try to determine whether industry can make a real contribution to the matter.
This could involve considerable consultation on a person to person basis with people in the industry who know the industry intimately, who are aware of the cases, and who are willing to explore the possibilities. We realize that there are problems in finding the right contributors, but we have demonstrated that it is worth the effort.
3. That if it is determined that industry can make a real contribution, the Government Instrumentality approaches the whole Industry with the facts and appeals especially to the principals of the businesses, especially the major players in the industry.
*Conscience is a very strong motivator. When our Association became aware of the circumstances of the child deaths through strangulation by window furnishing loops, we were able to say:
"This matter is real, children are dying, and here are the circumstances of some of these tragedies."
We were able, as parents and grand parents to, for a moment, consider what it would be like as the carer to be the one who was there when the little one lost their life, unaware of what was happening at the time, knowing that if we had been aware we could have done something about it.
An experience, those who have gone through, will carry with them for the rest of their life.
We realized that we may not be able to prevent all cases, but that there was a lot that we as an industry could do to perhaps prevent some cases. Treated as a public relations exercise, it worked.*
4. That blanket regulations be considered as a matter of last resort.
After looking at the case histories of child deaths through strangulation by window furnishing loops, we could see that the age of the victims was limited to a certain range, and the locations where the tragedies occurred were limited. We were as a result able to legitimately suggest exemptions.
5. That regulations apply to all.
In our industry importers of cheap substitutes for the "Do-it-yourself Market" should not be exempt.
6. That uniform regulations be promulgated between all the States and Territories of Australia.
*This is essential for our industry, because large quantities window furnishings cross state & territory boundaries.
There are manufacturers who supply to hundreds of distributors right across Australia, to some infrequently and to some who then trade across borders.*

On behalf of our Association I would like to thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Please feel free to make our thoughts public.

Yours sincerely



Peter Schweinsberg

Safety Officer - Blind Makers Association of Australia

Appendix A.

BMAA Recommendations to the Victorian Attorney General with regard to child deaths by strangulation by loops in window furnishing cords:

1. That we as an Association continue to make every effort to encourage members to:
Educate staff, distributors and in turn the public of the dangers.
Ensure that approved safety devices be used in all at risk locations.
Share information on safety devices.
We plead with Governments to approach this issue openly and work with the industry in a spirit of cooperation for the sake of the children and their families.
2. That:
 - a. Safety devices and warning tags be fitted to all new blinds where children may be exposed to danger.
 - b. Child safety information sheets be made available to every customer.That is for blinds supplied and fitted to all homes, pre-schools, hospital wards, etc., where there are likely to be children.
3. That where the bottom of a loop is 1600 mm above the point where adults stand, or more, that safety devices not be mandatory.
This is not the case in NSW or WA, where the requirement is for the loop to be 1600 mm up from the bottom of the blind, but it is stated in the brochure issued by the Federal Government's Consumer Safety Unit of The Treasury. Our Association does not agree with the NSW/WA determination.
4. That all blinds manufactured or imported and all custom blinds made for Do-it-Yourself installation be supplied with safety devices, warning tags and a warning notice / sheet .
Our Association is emphatic on this point. This type of blind, whether custom made or packaged is bought for self installation. These customers do not have the same benefit of a salesperson or an installer to advise or warn them of the dangers that Supply and Fit customers have.
5. That the fitting of safety devices etc., be optional for blinds installed in commercial premises or locations where children are not normally present, or if present are under constant supervision.
We cite here examples that come to mind: Petrol Service Stations behind the counter or the stock racks, but not in the restaurants beside the tables. Commercial offices, factory offices, government offices, warehouses, factories but definitely not in child minding & crèches. We would not exempt hotel and motel rooms which for the exercise can be regarded as temporary homes.
6. That uniform regulations be promulgated between all the States and Territories of Australia.
This is essential, because large quantities window furnishings cross state & territory boundaries. That there are manufacturers who supply to as many hundreds of distributors right across Australia, to some only infrequently and to some who then trade across borders.
7. That every effort be made to promote these recommendations to all manufacturers, importers and sellers of window furnishings with loops.
This will require a public relations exercise to demonstrate that:
 1. *These deaths are real and they are preventable.*
 2. *That these deaths have resulted in terrible suffering for the families involved.*
 3. *That with a small attitude change on the part of salesmen and installers, the effort is not onerous. There are thousands of window furnishing businesses across Australia, and although the BMAA represents probably most of the major manufacturers , there are still hundreds of small manufacturers who will have to be contacted by the State independently.*
8. External blinds, awnings, etc., with looped operating cords.
Our Association does not recommend any action.
We are not aware of any incident in Australia where a child has been strangled by one of these. None were listed in any of the Coroners reports that we have seen. We are looking at preventing misadventure of little ones who do not know the dangers and who do not have the dexterity or understanding of how to extract themselves from these dangerous situations. We are not looking at potential suicide.