



Consumer Federation of America

September 11, 2015

Corded Window Coverings NOI
Risk Management Strategies Division
Consumer Product Safety Directorate
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Submitted via email to cps-spc@hc-sc.gc.ca
Re: Corded Window Covering NOI

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing in response to the request for comments being sought regarding the “Summary of Risk Assessment of Corded Window Covering Products.”

We are Rachel Weintraub, Legislative Director and General Counsel, at Consumer Federation of America and Carol Pollack-Nelson, a Human Factors Psychologist and independent safety expert. We have both have worked on window covering safety issues for many years.

We are appreciative that Health Canada undertook this risk assessment and have worked for many years to reduce the strangulation risk posed by window coverings.

We will seek to address the questions that you posed.

1. Are there other considerations or data Health Canada should include in the Risk Assessment?

We applaud Health Canada’s risk assessment and think it was well drafted and documented important risks that window coverings pose to children. We recommend that the risk assessment also consider older incidents and those “older incidents” need to be defined. Importantly, the hazard posed by operational cords exists in both older and newer products. Thus, it is important not to dismiss that the key strangulation risk exists in all products and claiming that newer products do not pose the same risk is not accurate.

2. What action(s) could be taken to reduce the strangulation risk posed by corded window covering (CWC) products?

To effectively reduce the strangulation risk posed by corded window coverings, accessible window covering cords, specifically those that are capable of exceeding 7.5 inches in length in any position, should be banned. Without a doubt, reducing the number of products with hazardous accessible cords that can strangle children will reduce risk to children. An effective standard that addresses the strangulation hazard posed by window coverings is necessary because the current voluntary standard has failed to address the key hazard pattern associated with corded window coverings. For almost 20 years, the U.S. voluntary standard has repeatedly failed to address the issue in an effective way. The reason it has failed has been the same throughout this period of time – the standard still permits long cords capable of strangling children. Until this is no longer allowed, strangulation incidents will continue as they have.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has been communicating with the manufacturers of these products for years. Unfortunately, and consistently, the industry has refused to significantly address the issues posed by accessible cords. Decades have passed with the number of deaths and permanent injuries mounting unabated.

Significantly, the industry's voluntary standard in the United States has not significantly reduced the death rate. The CPSC is aware of 184 deaths due to strangulation and 101 severe injuries that did not result in death from children becoming entangled by cords on window coverings from 1996 through 2012. The CPSC estimates that at least 11 children die each year because of cords on window coverings.

3. Is technology to reduce the strangulation risk posed by CWC products available to the industry in Canada?

Yes. There are products on the market that do not pose strangulation risks to children. The research and technology already exists to design products without strangulation risks. Manufacturers know how to do this. In fact, manufacturers have stated to the CPSC that cordless options are available in every product category.¹ Although safer designs are available on the market, manufacturers currently sell some of them at premium pricing, making them cost-prohibitive for many families. If there is a mandatory standard, the price will decrease, making safe blinds more affordable and more accessible to all consumers. If Health Canada enacts a strong standard, it will ensure that this minimum level of safety is applied to all products for sale in the market. This will protect all consumers effectively and will strengthen the market for companies who want to innovate to protect children.

4. What window covering products (e.g. products used in commercial settings, large-sized products and products used with skylight windows) should be in or out of the scope of any risk reduction actions and why?

Ideally all window coverings should be included in the scope of an effective standard. The standard should seek to address the vast majority of window coverings on the market. However, if the scope had to be narrowed, one way to limit the scope would be to exempt coverings for

¹ Statement of Tom Merker, Director of Engineering at Springs Window Fashion, Inc, at a CPSC public meeting with WCMA on May 27, 2015.

unusually large and wide window coverings that because of their weight, make cordless technology impossible to apply. It is important that the standard apply to window coverings used for commercial and home settings and to as many sizes of window coverings as possible.

5. What are the technical barriers to reducing the strangulation risk posed by CWC products?

N/A

6. Would other product features be affected by design changes that aim to reduce the strangulation risk posed by CWC products?

Yes. Product features that would be affected by design changes include cord cleats, inner cord stoppers and tension devices since these are up dubious safety value. If cords were required to be inaccessible, the use of these devices would not be necessary which would be an important safety gain.

7. Are there types of windows in Canada that cannot be effectively covered except by window coverings with accessible operating cords?

According to an American manufacturer of window coverings, cordless options are available in every product category of window coverings. Due to industry innovation, if there are any windows that truly cannot be covered, that universe is very small.

8. How would a requirement to reduce the strangulation risk posed by CWC products affect your business operations: (a) financially? (b) in other ways?

While we do not represent a business entity that manufacturers window coverings, we have considered this economic argument. First we know that there are lower-cost cordless products available now,² which means that some manufacturers are innovating at a lower price point to make these safer products more accessible to more people.

A ban on the sale of corded products would level the playing field and make the entire market safer. It will also likely bring down the cost of all compliant products as this has been seen in past implementations of voluntary standards. It is important to remember that a standard which eliminates hazardous accessible cords does not impact the demand for new window coverings.

Consumers continue to have windows that need to be covered and consumers will continue to purchase window coverings. A more effective standard will ensure that when consumers buy

² Wal-Mart has cordless blinds for \$15 now for standard size windows.<http://www.walmart.com/ip/Better-Homes-and-Gardens-White-Cordless-1-in.-Vinyl-Mini-Blind/27830751>; Menards has cordless blinds for \$16 per window.<http://www.menards.com/main/window-treatments/blinds-shades/vinyl-blinds/designers-image-cordless-vinyl-light-filtering-mini-blind-33-x-64/p-2188896.htm>; Amazon has cordless blinds for \$13 per window http://www.amazon.com/Achim-Home-Furnishings-64-Inch-Darkening/dp/B00P8QJ9US/ref=sr_1_4?s=home-garden&ie=UTF8&qid=1428962137&sr=1-4&keywords=cordless+window+blinds+vinyl.

new window coverings, they are replacing their existing, hazardous window coverings with products that do not present a strangulation hazard.

Finally, an effective standard that effectively reduces the strangulation risk posed by corded window coverings does not prohibit the sale of window coverings. Rather, it provides a valid reason for people to replace their hazardous window coverings with something safer. By definition, the fact that the market will comprise of safer products means that safer products will be purchased.

9. If a requirement to reduce the strangulation risk is implemented, are there any particular considerations that should be taken into account with respect to subpopulations, such as those with mental or physical disabilities, the elderly or children?

Yes. Children are most at risk for strangulation death and injuries and banning accessible cords would have a significant impact on the incident. For the elderly and people with disabilities, it is important not to assume that all such people have the same needs and limitations. There are many types of physical disabilities. Cord cleats are out of reach for individuals in wheel chairs and those with hand weaknesses may not be able to grasp cords making operational cords difficult to use. Cordless options such as wands and motorized cords could prove to be useful to some people with certain disabilities.

10. If a requirement to reduce the risk of strangulation posed by corded window covering products is implemented, do you anticipate that all products currently in use will be replaced by consumers over time? On average, how long do consumers use CWC products?

A requirement to reduce the risk of strangulation posed by corded window coverings will provide clarity in the market place by ensuring that the only window coverings available for sale are those that do not present a strangulation hazard due to hazardous accessible cords.

Currently, unsafe window coverings share the same retail space with safer alternatives. A more effective standard will eliminate the confusion in the market by ensuring that products for sale no longer pose a strangulation risk.

By eliminating window coverings with hazardous accessible cords, consumers can be confident that they are replacing unsafe products with safer ones. A market full of safer products will provide clear and definitive information about the safety of new products versus the strangulation hazard posed by old products.

11. What percent of the window covering market, as measured by sales, do corded window coverings represent? Please provide your information by corded window covering type.

N/A

In conclusion, a strong standard for window coverings that effectively addresses the strangulation risk posed by accessible cords is necessary to protect the public from the unreasonable risk of harm posed by these products. A strong standard will reduce consumer confusion in the marketplace and lead to more homes with products that don't pose risks to children. We applaud Health Canada for conducting this risk assessment and urge Health Canada to move forward on an effective standard as quickly as possible. Time is of the essence as these products pose risks to children every single day.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by,

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