



Standards continue to set the pace at AFRDI

by Bob Panitzki CEO Furntech-AFRDI

All too soon for many of us, Christmas has come around again, and the New Year awaits...I hope, with economic recovery a strong likelihood.

It's no hollow wish about recovery. There are many signs that point to the need for more testing, greater compliance, and the need to balance the twin questions of cost versus quality and sustainability. These are the questions that AFRDI considers every working day, in the exercise of testing, and in the writing of technical standards.

Governments across the land are calling for higher performance from the furniture we sell, with a well-demonstrated ability through the courts recently to mete out punishment to those who don't meet expectations, or more importantly, various ethical, legal and performance standards.

So, my news to you all is that we are now about to enter the public review period for plastic monobloc chairs, AS/NZS 3813:1998. It will be good to have revised standards to apply to these chairs that are in widespread use.

Similarly, the review of the standards for office desks and office panel systems, AS/NZS 4442:1997 and AS/NZS 4443: 1997, is progressing. The aim is to update requirements and to clarify and improve the test methods to accommodate design improvements and workplace design changes.

The proposal to amend Standard AS/NZS 4610.3:1999, school and education furniture – tables and storage furniture – strength, durability and stability sections has been approved by Standards Australia. However, to better clarify requirements, the working group is expecting Standards Australia approval to expand the work item and split the standard – one for tables and one for storage furniture.



Season's Greetings from everyone at Furntech-AFRDI. Thanks for your business in 2014. We look forward to working with you again in 2015.

Strong attendance at Furntech-AFRDI AGM: new board member appointed

A sign of the times, perhaps, that the economy is on the upturn for the Australian furniture industry, but AFRDI's AGM was marked this year by the attendance of 30 people, considerably more than normal.

The meeting returned all existing board members, with Peter McCutcheon as chairman and Mark Copperwaite deputy. The rest of the board members are Dane Walsh (Director, Watts Commercial Furniture), a member of the executive committee; Vince Angelucci (Sales Manager, Eccosit Pty Ltd); Matthew Moore (Director, BFX HO); Marcus Nelson (Corporate QA Manager, Harvey Norman); Ken Payne (R&D Manager, Sebel Furniture Ltd); Patrizia Torelli (CEO, Australian Furniture Association); Tony Rogers (Director, Woods Educational); and Ben Wortley (Managing Director, Wortley Group).

The board also welcomed **Alf de la Harpe**, who replaces Jared Barton. Currently Head of Product Quality at Freedom, Alf has long experience in the furniture industry (since 1985), backed up by a degree in mechanical engineering and an MBA. His hope for the future? That the Australian industry will be able to maintain its current diversity, and not be swallowed up by major players.



Furniture Prequalification Scheme explained

AFRDI's AGM was addressed by Maria Chan, Lead Category Specialist, with New South Wales Procurement.

The prequalification scheme aims to enhance value for money, improve quality of furniture and compliance to NSW government legislation and policies, and to encourage regular collaboration between government and industry.

The scheme addresses issues within the following sectors: seating, steel furniture, workstation systems and accessories, and recycled and refurbished furniture.

Those participating in the scheme will be required to report every three months, and will be subject to review after six months.

AFRDI's Chief Executive Officer, Bob Panitzki, said the Prequalification Scheme addressed many important issues, and implementation of the scheme would almost certainly bring long-term benefits to the industry.

AFRDI fees

AFRDI is increasing fees in the New Year by three per cent, the same as the CPI for the year ending June 2014.

The new fees will apply from February 2015.

AFRDI Chief Executive Officer Bob Panitzki points out that the increase is the first for three years, marking the company's desire to try to contain fees at a time of financial difficulty for the furniture industry.

Please...follow the instructions

A plea from the AFRDI testing team – please follow the instructions, and save yourself time and money.

Recently, says AFRDI Chief Executive Officer Bob Panitzki, we've had a number of instances where chairs have arrived for testing, but testing can't go ahead. The reason is quite simple, Bob says, and it's simply that customers have not taken the time to read the instructions for samples.

When testing fixed height chairs, for example, AFRDI requests a number of examples, some with and some without arms.

"It really depends on whether the arms are an add-on, not really part of the main structure, or whether, as is common in some chairs, the arms form an integral brace from the front to the back of the chair.

"We need to know how chairs perform under duress, and that's why we ask for a number of samples.

"Quite recently, we have had to ask people to send us fresh samples, simply because we did not have the right kind of sample."

Bob says the answer to the problem, and the way to speed up testing, is to read ALL the details in the quotation, and to comply with them.

New safety standard for bean bags

The Minister for Small Business, Bruce Billson, has introduced a new Safety Standard for Bean Bags, following a number of incidents involving children swallowing polystyrene bead filling material.

The new standard, effective January 1 2016, mandates a notice (viewable online [here](#)) be fixed securely to a bean bag, or be stamped on it, with the message:

WARNING: Children can suffocate if bean bag filling is swallowed or inhaled. Do not let children climb inside this bean bag. A bean bag is **not a safe** sleeping surface for an infant under 12 months of age.

The new standard also mandates that the zip or slide fastener to the bag incorporate a locking mechanism which prevents the sliding piece opening the slide-fastener unless a wholly separate device is used to disengage the locking mechanism and act as a handle in moving the sliding piece between the teeth.

Supporting the case for greater care, the US Consumer Product Safety Commission reports the death of two children – a 13 year old boy from Texas, and a three year old girl from Kentucky - from suffocation after climbing inside bean bags.

The US has a voluntary standard requiring non-refillable bean bags to have closed and permanently disabled zippers.

Furniture recycling moves from the theoretical to the practical

For more than a decade, recycling furniture to reduce landfill and waste in general has been on many countries' wish-lists: France now has a scheme that is gaining momentum, despite readily identifiable inefficiencies and costs.

The journal **Urethanes Technology International** reports on progress since 2011, when 24 of France's largest producers and retailers set up Eco-Mobilier, a state-approved not-for-profit to manage the process of recycling.

Eco-Mobilier is financed by a recycling fee which is added to the product price, in the same way that much of Europe already does for electronic and electrical equipment. Eco-Mobilier started operation in May last year.

Reflecting initial reluctance to participate, all products on the market now pay the recycling fee, but only about 30% of waste furniture is currently collected and recycled.

Who's paying the fee? Two-thirds of fees collected so far come from furniture manufacturers, 17% from bedding manufacturers and an equal amount from seat manufacturers. Mattresses and seats, which contain the most polyurethane foam, make up about 24% of waste furniture. But by far the largest component in waste is wood.

The volumes for recycling are huge. Projecting forward to 2020, Eco-Mobilier estimates it will be dealing each year with 900,000 tonnes of wood, 150,000 tonnes of metal, 60,000 tonnes of polyurethane and 60,000 tonnes of latex.

Waste is sorted into five different streams: wood, metal, plastics, mattresses and padded furniture. Each stream is further processed at specialised treatment plants which either recover the components or send them elsewhere for energy recovery.

Tempering enthusiasm with realism, the company expects to reach a target of about 45% recycling and 80% recovery by 2020.

What happens to recycled materials? Polyurethane is mechanically recycled into insulating materials for buildings, sport floor coverings and also into furniture. Upholstered seats are currently dismantled but it is too difficult to separate the foam from other components, and the foam usually becomes part of refuse-derived fuel.

In what may rate as an understatement of some magnitude, Eco-Mobilier's research and systems director Cecile des Abbayes says the company will have to do a lot more research, and because the market is not ready, a lot of innovation will be needed.

Ms des Abbayes adds that in addition to the need for new technology, there is also wariness in Europe about using mechanically recycled mattresses in consumer products. One of the hurdles to be overcome is to make such waste suitably treated so that consumers regard it as being hygienic.

Non-compliance on cots brings fines from ACCC

Toys “R” Us Australia Pty Ltd (Toys R Us) has paid a penalty of \$10,200 after the issue of an infringement notice by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in relation to the supply of ‘Nantucket 4-in-1’ household cots that did not comply with the mandatory safety standard. Toys R Us has also provided a court enforceable undertaking to the ACCC.

Toys R Us operates over 30 Toys “R” Us and Babies “R” Us stores throughout Australia, as well as an online Toys “R” Us store. It sold the Nantucket cots online and in its stores between February and November 2013.

Toys R Us recalled the Nantucket cots after testing obtained by the ACCC identified that the cots did not comply with the safety standard and that there was a risk of injury or death to infants from the cots, including from falls, entrapment or suffocation. Toys R Us cooperated with the ACCC and initiated a recall shortly after being contacted.

ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard said: “Adopting and maintaining a comprehensive compliance program is a fundamental aspect of any retailer’s ability to comply with safety standards.”

As part of the court enforceable undertaking Toys R Us has provided to the ACCC, it has agreed to provide further notices to consumers about the recall, to continue to offer free collection of affected cots and refunds to customers, and to implement a consumer law compliance program with a particular focus on enhancing its product safety procedures.

5,500 household cots have been recalled since 2013 as a result of the ACCC’s cot safety surveillance program.

All told, the ACCC made a recall of 267 consumer goods during 2013-14.

And in the United States, it is now two years since the Christmas deadline for child care centres, hotels, motels and places of public accommodation to comply with new crib standards.

All cribs made and sold after December 28th 2012 were required to meet the new standards, which prohibit traditional drop-side cribs, strengthen crib slats and mattress supports, improve the quality of hardware, and require more rigorous testing from entering the marketplace.

As a postscript, it’s interesting to note that the US Consumer Product Safety Commission in August this year reported that despite the cessation of manufacture of dropside cribs, structural problems do still occur. In this case, the crib front was found in some cases to separate from the side panels, creating a hazardous gap that could allow a child to fall out or become entrapped between the front and side panels. Prior to 2013, the CPSC noted that three-quarters of recalls related to failures in the dropside mechanisms.

The Australian standard for household cots, AS/NZS 2172, was updated in 2013, and includes more severe testing for dropside cots, which are still legal in this country.

Scotland to expand its forestry industry

With nary a mention of managed investment schemes or other ‘incentives’ that have dogged the Australian forestry landscape for decades, Scotland is set to embark on expanding its dwindling forestry reserves, in an attempt to participate in meeting growing world demand for timber products.

The need for expansion was brought to light recently at a forestry conference, in which a number of speakers urged that the industry examine not just domestic needs, but the possibility of helping to meet world forest products shortages.

The shortage has been caused by many factors, but prime amongst them is the recovery of the US housing market, which is largely wood-based. However, by far the most significant factor is said to be an enormous demand for timber and fibre from the rapidly growing economies of Asia, notably China.

China is said to be importing more fibre – all wood products, including logs, pulp and paper, and woodchips – than is produced every year by the giant Canadian forest industry.

The conference was told that forestry and forest products are increasingly recognised as central to a sustainable global future. The carbon load of wood buildings, for example, is much lower over a building’s lifetime than other building materials.

In a message which should have strong resonance in Australia, Scottish interests were advised that more productive forest planting is needed now to ensure a vibrant future for the sector.

But, not all is sweetness and light. An Internet search reveals that the Royal Society for Protection of Birds opposes some specific proposed areas of forest expansion, because of the danger of reducing established habitat for threatened bird species.

Change of focus for Herman Miller

One of the world’s biggest players in the office furniture market, **Herman Miller**, is moving towards making more domestic furniture.

Herman Miller has acquired **Design Within Reach**, a distributor of modern furniture, lighting and accessories, thus giving HM a new platform to accelerate growth in the consumer segment.

Herman Miller’s management views the domestic furniture market as far less volatile than the office furniture industry, as well as offering greater growth potential.

CEO Brian Walker says the company is not moving away from contract office furniture. Rather, the new move seeks to tap the much larger consumer segment at a time when mobile technology enables people to work from just about anywhere.



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