

Is society only paying lip service to a deadly problem?

As Product Safety Australia (PSA) describes it, there is a clearly defined danger. Small children tend to climb on furniture such as free standing bookcases, TVs, drawers, wardrobes and sideboards and, if the furniture is not secured, the child's weight can cause it to topple. PSA says falling furniture can not only strike a child, but can trap and crush them, or lead to suffocation.

At least 14 children under the age of nine have died in Australia in accidents caused by falling furniture between 2000 and now. That's an average of one death, possibly preventable, each year.

While child deaths take the headlines, the magnitude of the injury problem can be appreciated through other statistics, such as those supplied by the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit, where Monash University recorded 909 emergency department visits in Victoria in the period June 2006 to June 2014 for injuries related to furniture tip-overs. Mater Health Service in Queensland recorded 1,032 cases during a five year period. *(Many of these injuries may relate to chairs rather than storage units – the statistics do not give a break-down).*

Roy Morgan Research, commissioned by the ACCC to investigate the injury from toppling furniture problem *(Consumer Awareness of Furniture Stability Risks and Prevention [May 2015])*, identifies some parents are unwilling to 'invest' in buying brackets to secure furniture either because they believe the equipment is unnecessary. Others feel that as their property is rented, it's either not possible to attach brackets, or simply not worth the expenditure. But around one-third of those interviewed said they would be likely to purchase brackets or anchors.

The necessary steps to secure furniture are laid out in AS/NZS 4935. The Standard mainly addresses stability without securing straps. However, it does recommend fitment of straps, especially for units that fail. **MORE ON PAGE 6.**



Season's Greetings from everyone at Furntech-AFRDI. Thanks for your business in 2015. We look forward to working with you again in 2016.

“Having our furniture tested independently has taught us a lot about manufacturing and what quality really means”

It's a long quote to start a story, but that's how Sal Scarce feels about the first foray of Queensland's Noosa-based Green Cathedral bespoke furniture into the world of production furniture.

As the name bespoke suggests, when Sal and husband Timothy, a former aircraft engineer, started their business seven years ago, its focus was on very limited production. At first, the fledgling company concentrated on rustic style pieces, but Sal says Timothy longed to work on some of his own designs.

Eventually, the company started a production run on *Babanees stools, and this sparked an expansion into Timothy's designs for relaxed furniture for the sub-tropical Queensland climate.

But it wasn't until Green Cathedral contested a contract to supply furniture to a local shopping centre that independent testing became an issue.



“They told us we would have to have the range tested to Level 6 for insurance purposes,” Sal says. “Up to that point we hadn't thought about testing, but now that we have been working with AFRDI, we realise that we can improve our product range in many ways. It's even encouraged Timothy to find better ways to joint materials, for example.”

Green Cathedral relies on CNC cutting for much of its production, and an entry-level machine has now been replaced with a state of the art one, reflecting the move from limited production to a more commercial outlook. AFRDI expects to be able to advise the company on its new designs as they emerge.

**Babanees is an old school surfing term meaning 'sexy and attractive'*



Addressing design details can save future problems

Reading the online reports of the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission can provide a valuable insight into the need for careful detailing of consumer products to ensure adequate performance.

A current case in point is a Chinese made high-backed reading chair, with four wooden legs, the front two on casters. The report centres on the fact that a number of chairs collapsed at the front, and in one case, the user fell from the chair.

The reason for the leg failure appears to be simple – in some of the chairs offered for sale, no supporting blocks were attached to the legs, enabling them to bend over and eventually detach from the chair's base.

Such details may appear insignificant, but in AFRDI's experience, it's the little details in manufacture that make a world of difference, and materially affect the performance of any item under test – itself a reflection of real-world usage.

New Website for Furntech-AFRDI

In conjunction with our Webhosts, Web Support & Outsourcing (WebOS), Furntech-AFRDI has developed a new, more contemporary Website.

Featuring improved content accessibility and a cleaner, more compact page layout overall, it has also been designed to be viewed through a range of Web browsers and (mobile) devices.

The Members area of the site remains under construction, and shall become accessible via restricted log-in soon. Comments or feedback regarding our new site are welcomed to info@furntech.org.au

AFRDI's Web address remains www.furntech.org.au

AFRDI Board

Following AFRDI's board meeting in November, the composition of the Board remains unchanged, but composition of the three member Executive has changed. Dane Walsh replaces Mark Copperwaite as deputy chair. Peter McCutcheon remains as chairman, with Ben Wortley becoming an executive member.

Holiday period

Furntech-AFRDI closes for the holiday break at midday on Wednesday December 23rd. Limited staff will be on site again from Monday January 18th.

Standards update

Review and update of AS/NZS 3813 Plastic Monobloc Chairs

Resolving the UV issues mentioned in earlier issues is under way. The standard should be ready for publication in the first half of next year.

AS/NZS 4442/4443 Desk and Workstation Standards

Lee Bowkett has completed the second half of the draft (strength, durability and stability). Once comments are dealt with, the intended next stage will be to request desk samples (from the manufacturers on the committee) so that AFRDI can thoroughly test the standard prior to its publication.

AS/NZS 4610 School and Educational Furniture

The project was put on hold for several months, but a scoping document has now been completed. AFRDI staff have also completed the Basketball Impactor which will enable evaluations of appropriate horizontal impact severity for various types of school and educational furniture. This information will be used in the new standard.



Loss of endorsement may affect Australian importers

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources advises of the expired endorsement of PEFC Russian National Forest Certification Scheme .

The notice affects importers of regulated timber products or timber inputs from Russia who rely on the Russian Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) process to demonstrate compliance with Australia's Illegal Logging legislation.

Under the *Illegal Logging Prohibition Regulation 2012*, importers of regulated timber products can assess that the risk of the timber having been illegally logged is low, if the product is PEFC certified. However, PEFC International has advised that all certificates issued under Russia's National Forest Certification Scheme have ceased to be recognised by PEFC from 3 September 2015.

This means that until Russia regains endorsement of their Scheme, any claim that timber from Russia is PEFC certified cannot be used to demonstrate compliance with Australia's Illegal Logging legislation. Importers must satisfy the due diligence requirements of the *Illegal Logging Prohibition Regulation 2012* through other means as outlined in the regulation.

What happens next?

PEFC advises that the revised Russian National Forest Certification Scheme was submitted for PEFC endorsement in early 2014 and is currently in the final stages of its assessment process. Once compliance with PEFC's Sustainability Benchmarks are demonstrated, the scheme will be submitted to the PEFC General Assembly for re-endorsement. Once the revised Russian Scheme has been re-endorsed by PEFC, certificates to the revised schemes will again be recognised by PEFC. This can then be used to demonstrate compliance with Australia's Illegal Logging legislation.

Mexico emerging as major player in US industry reshoring

The US business consultancy AlixPartners is predicting that Mexico is becoming a major player as North American companies continue to bring manufacturing sent to China in recent decades closer to home.

While the founder and president of the Reshoring Initiative, Harry Moser, says that the 400-thousand jobs that have come to the US so far are few compared with China's estimated 150 million manufacturing workers, the impact in North America is significant. Moser estimates 40 per cent of reshoring jobs go to the US, 25 per cent to Mexico, with the remainder split between Canada, Vietnam, Cambodia and India.

As for China, he expects the trend to reshoring to grow as China's economy stalls below growth of seven per cent a year, and predicts that future fast growth (by Western standards) will depend more on the Chinese domestic economy than exports.

ACCC applies penalties for false or misleading representations

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has imposed penalties of \$32,400 in relation to alleged false or misleading representations about the protein content of certain Uncle Tobys brand oats products.

In print media and on television, packaging contained the statement 'Natural Source of Protein Superfood'. The ACCC says the claim was only true when the oat product was served with skim milk, but was only mentioned in fine print.

In a statement with broad implications for industry, including the furniture sector, ACCC chairman Rod Sims commented that truth in advertising, particularly where misleading claims are made, is a priority enforcement area for the ACCC.

Can school furniture influence education outcomes...a design gamble that has paid off

Queensland based furniture manufacturer BFX has found that commitment to informed design coupled with independent testing is a winning formula. The company's school-focused E-Chair has recently passed sales of 250-thousand units.



Designed by Erick Buma, BFX's major projects manager and senior designer, the chair was introduced in 2010. It was designed to be ergonomically supportive, four-way seating functional, easy to store, stack and move, stable and difficult to tip. These design qualities have been combined with a forward spring motion to give some movement. Company insiders say the design concept was inspired by the graceful lines of a giraffe.

Robert Ax, BFX's marketing and design coordinator, says that when introduced, the E-Chair design came as a surprise to traditional educators, who were not used to students being able to rock or bounce on a chair, let alone sit sideways or backwards. "It was those at the forefront of changing the delivery method of education who understood immediately the concept and philosophy behind the E-chair design, and embraced it fully," Robert says.

Safety wise, the chair has now been certified by AFRDI under AFRDI Standard 151 at 135kg, a testament to the fundamental strength of the design.

BFX is not done with innovation. Watch this space over the coming year, says Robert Ax.

Jobs for kids as testers?

While AFRDI as a testing and certification authority labours over the development of new tests, we perhaps (and we say this only slightly tongue in cheek) are ignoring one of the most valuable testing resources – young kids.

The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission is currently reporting the recall of more than 30-thousand campfire rocking chairs. As the CPSC says in its report "the chair can tip backwards while rocking, posing a fall hazard to the user." All well and good, but when we read down through the report, we find that it's not adults who are having problems with the chair, but children.

The CPSC received four reports of kids who tipped over in the chairs while they were in stores – no injuries were reported. But it does underline the fact that kids can use products in ways which manufacturers sometimes don't anticipate. Perhaps we need a few on the staff at AFRDI!

Furniture stability...from Page 1

At an industry level, we should be more active in ensuring that suitable restraints/anchors/straps are provided with free-standing furniture, not as an add-on, but as part of the package. **Ask yourself: who sells a car without seatbelts?** Securing any unstable furniture is basic safety practice, and we need to push towards making it universally adopted.

But here's the rub. The Standard was published in 2009, and was developed as a response to the outcome of numerous inquests into fatalities. Yet despite the evident need for stability testing, there's been virtually a zero response from industry to have testing done.

It is up to the industry to do the right thing by society and engage in a little testing, or include security straps where required as part of the furniture package.

What does testing cost? If a customer sends an item to AFRDI, the cost is a flat rate of \$850 per item. If a client wants items tested in situ, the cost may be higher, reflecting travel and accommodation costs, but as an example, ten items will cost within the range of \$590-730 each, depending on location.



All the best from the Staff at AFRDI

