

the AFRDI bulletin

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How an arbitrary figure has been ‘set in concrete’, and how that’s not necessarily a bad thing

AS/NZS 4438:1997, covering gas-lift office chairs, is a Standard that is still used frequently at AFRDI and is still commonly specified in tender documents.

Search the Standard, and you won’t find any statements about what is a reasonable ‘user weight rating’ to be inferred from the tests. Yet AFRDI has settled on a figure, saying that a chair tested to 4438 will be suitable for a person weighing up to about 110kg.

How did AFRDI arrive at such a figure, and who’s to say a manufacturer who rates his AFRDI tested chair at, say, 130kg, is wrong?

As with many things in life, there’s something of a history to this ‘magic’ figure of 110kg. It has evolved, says AFRDI’s technical manager, Ian Burton, from comparisons with other internationally respected tests that do state user mass limits, and is based on an understanding of the intentions of the standards’ authors.

So why does AFRDI get upset when a chair it has nominally rated at 110kg appear in advertising at a higher figure?

“We recommend that a chair only be advertised with our name and logo if it is advertised at the weight rating implied when certified,” Ian says. “Retailers, manufacturers and distributors can claim a higher user weight rating if they choose, but they must not use that rating alongside our logo (which implies AFRDI approval), and the chair’s rating should be annotated with words to the effect that **“XYZ (company name) rates this chair at NNN weight”**”. In other words, the onus of guarantee or warranty falls to the person or organisation making the claim. It is not AFRDI’s role to support user weight ratings outside those which it considers to be correct.

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Drawing on first principles to devise meaningful tests

Having been in the business of scientific testing for more than 26 years, it shouldn't come as a surprise that AFRDI has the ability to devise tests for unusual furniture.

Technical manager Ian Burton is often asked to do some creative thinking when companies develop new products which don't neatly fit into current testing regimes i.e. standards.

"We have to be imaginative. How will this product be used and how is it likely to fail. We look at factors such as vertical strength, the possibility of racking, the strengths of the sides and of the joints, and then examine factors such as potential for flammability, and what might be called 'reasonable' misuse," Ian Burton said.

"In short, it means looking over a wide range of existing tests, and sometimes developing new tests - considering what is relevant.

"Using one example, while we understood the structure would be used by school children – for whom we would assume an average mass of 60-70kg per student – we decided to static test the seating by placing a 180kg load every 500mm. It comes down to a judgment call, based on engineering principles, my own experience, and the experience of the team leaders and testing officers.

"We often find that we have to go back to first principles, but in the end, that combined with experience makes us confident that the testing regimes we devise are both fair and meaningful."

Time flies when you're having fun!

Jill Stancombe is the voice that most often answers the phone at AFRDI.

As administration officer, she's also responsible for carrying out a diversified role that ranges from shipping clerk, through to maintaining a multitude of accounts, and filing away thousands of test reports.

Jill recently clocked up 20 years of service, formally acknowledged by the AFRDI Board, but CEO Bob Panitzki thought that a memento was also called for: a small plaque recording the event.



ACCC bares its teeth over false and misleading advertising

In a case that has eerily close parallels to matters which have been of concern to AFRDI for the past several years*, the ACCC has fined two companies over false and misleading representation.

Supabarn Supermarkets Pty Ltd (Supabarn) and The Real Juice Company Pty Ltd each paid penalties totalling \$20,400. The issue was representations made about two juice products from the private label range of juices made by The Real Juice Company and sold by Supabarn.

The ACCC issued the infringement notices because it had reasonable grounds to believe that Supabarn and The Real Juice Company had made false or misleading representations about the composition of the private label two litre apple and cranberry juice products, in contravention of Australian Consumer Law.

The ACCC said the juice company made claims that the apple juice was made locally using the freshest quality apples, that it was straight from a farm, and made in Griffith, when in fact the product was made from reconstituted apple juice concentrate imported from China.

The cranberry juice claimed it did not contain added sugar, no artificial flavours, colours or preservatives, when the product contained added sugar and other additives.

ACCC chairman Rod Sims said: “Truth in advertising is a priority area for the ACCC. Consumers should be able to make informed purchasing decisions and not be misled regarding the composition of products”.

Mr Sims added that both manufacturers and retailers could be held responsible for representations made on packaging or labeling of products they supply. “Each level of the supply chain should have systems in place to ensure their products are compliant with Australian Consumer Law,” he said.

**AFRDI continues to pursue a number of companies over false or misleading claims relating to testing, certification, product names, incorrect use of intellectual property including logos, and false and misleading advertising.*

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UK furniture firm brings manufacturing back to England

Fuda-Hobart Rose, which was established in 1959, has tapped into support from the UK's Business Growth Service and the Let's Grow fund to reshore up to 20% of its manufacturing back from China after customers demanded greater flexibility and quicker lead times.

The company is investing more than £250,000 and hundreds of hours of manpower into integrating the new lines and identifying local supply chain partners.

With strategic advice from its local Business Growth Manager and funding from the Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS), the firm is now producing occasional furniture for companies such as Dunelm, John Lewis and Next.

Initial projections suggest annual sales will double from its current £8m to £16m by 2020, with 100 jobs also due to be created.

Executive chairman David Rose said: "The UK's furniture manufacturing sector was decimated between 2000 and 2011 as a result of imports, so it's great to be able to 'home-shore' certain products to the North East.

"Made in the UK is back in vogue with escalating freight costs and issues over quality making it a lot more competitive to manufacture in this country. Our customers are also looking for shorter lead times between the placing and delivery of orders, something that would be impossible if we were getting them made in the Far East."

From BQ Live

AFRDI provides input to ACCC paper on test reports

AFRDI has made a submission to the ACCC's consulting paper into criteria for accepting international standards and risk assessments for product safety.

The paper is part of a government process to reduce red tape. A report is expected to be published in July this year.



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Always beware of tipping hazards

From the United States Consumer Products Safety Commission comes a timely warning about the dangers to children in particular when domestic cupboards and similar items tip over.

In the case under mention, plastic restraint straps were used by a Vietnamese manufacturer to secure sideboards, dressers and hutches to walls – but in one case, involving a double dresser – the restraint snapped. The restraint has since undergone a re-design.

AFRDI addresses the question of stability in furniture in all of its AFRDI Blue Tick certification programs, and in particular the danger of tipping objects to young children, in the company's certification program based on *AS/NZS4935:2009* Domestic Furniture – freestanding chests of drawers, wardrobes and bookshelves and bookcases.

In these columns, we've already pointed to the need to install safety straps between larger flat screen televisions and walls, so that a heavy screen will not topple on to a child. It's a case where vigilance plus the certainty that using tested products can bring goes a long way towards ensuring safe and happy lives.

Safety Warning Notice on Wooden Baby Sleigh Cot Bed

The Minister for Small Business, Bruce Billson, has published a Safety Warning Notice for a Wooden Baby Sleigh Cot Bed supplied by Frank Masons Pty Ltd.

The safety warning notice states that the cot does not comply with the mandatory safety standard for children's cots and presents safety risks to children. The cot (available in two colours) was supplied between 1 January 2014 and 25 July 2014 and is marked with the following identifying features:

BC – 026

Batch Number SDK130064. Affected cots have the marking on the base: December 2013.

Weight ratings...*continued from page 1*

"There's another factor which some manufacturers and retailers often overlook," adds Ian Burton, "and that is the experience AFRDI has gained since the introduction of the AFRDI Rated Load suite of standards, introduced to reflect recent relatively rapid changes in human height and weight.

"Early testing to the RL standard (which is generally more severe than testing under the 'normal' 4438 standard) saw a number of chairs fail quite early in testing.

"It suggested to AFRDI that while the chairs we tested and certified as being suitable for a person weighing up to about 110kg were sound, the same would not necessarily hold true for increases in the weight of occupants."

If there's a take-home point from all of this, it is that while AFRDI is hardly infallible, its user weight ratings have been derived from research and experience, and they should be regarded as 'fair use' for the product under description. Besides, rating a product higher than its certified value has the potential for increasing suppliers' exposure to compensation claims should product failure give rise to personal injury.