

**SUCCESS!**

## STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

### Electronic Newsletter a success

Reaction to the new format of Furntech-AFRDI News has been very positive. We are currently collecting email addresses which will make the distribution arrangements even more efficient. If you would like to register for future editions of the newsletter please send us an email at [info@furntech.org.au](mailto:info@furntech.org.au)

# One Standard One test

## One Standard, One Test, Accepted Everywhere

The theme for International Standards Day this year sums up the aim of the global technical infrastructure community.

While the process is agonisingly slow, real progress is being made on bringing standards together. The European community has been working on common standards for over a decade and the next step seems to be the adoption by ISO of the European standards. That is certainly happening in furniture with ISO TC 136 making significant progress on the adoption of the European office chair standard EN 1335. Within 2 or 3 years that will form the basis of an ISO standard which Australia and New Zealand will most likely adopt.

Real progress is also being made in developing Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) between laboratory accreditation bodies around the world. Under these arrangements Furntech-AFRDI test reports have been accepted in Japan, the United States, Britain, France and Germany.

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### Merger Discussions Continue with CFIAA

The proposed merger between Furntech-AFRDI and the Commercial Furniture Industry Association (CFIAA) is taking longer to finalise than was originally envisaged.

The Furntech-AFRDI Board has stipulated that a condition of any merger with the industry association would be that the independence of the testing, certification and inspection functions must be guaranteed under the new arrangements.

### Research Developments

Under the funding arrangements for the Wood Innovation CRC based at the University of Melbourne, the Institute can generate a net sum of around \$80,000 this financial year doing worthwhile research into timber joints.

In addition to testing products developed by the other parts of the CRC team, Furntech's main project is to test the strength and suitability of timber joints in furniture. While this is a basic part of any cabinet-making course, our literature search indicates that there is very little scientific data available. That is not to say that what is taught at trade schools is incorrect – there is much to be said for methods based on generations of experience.

A Masters student recently commenced CRC-related studies at the University of Tasmania. Our Laboratory Manager, Ian Burton, will be responsible for liaison with the new student who will work closely with the Launceston laboratory.

### Good Result for 2001-02

After some years trading below the line, Furntech-AFRDI has recorded a healthy profit for the last financial year and looks headed for another positive result this year.

The improvement is largely due to the start of the research funding from the Co-Operative Research Centre (CRC) on Wood Innovations, a strong demand for Blue Tick certification renewals and the work the Institute has been doing in checking bunk beds against the new mandatory standard.

Furntech-AFRDI, as a not-for-profit organisation, doesn't have shareholders it has to satisfy but it is important that we fund our own activities, at least on a cash basis.

### Board Changes

The recent Annual General Meeting saw a number of changes to the Institute's Board. The new Chairman is Peter McCutcheon, National Marketing Manager with Sebel Furniture in Sydney. Peter took over from Tim Threlfall of Elite Built in Melbourne following two challenging and successful years.

One of the furniture industry's father figures, Harry Sebel OAM, also retired as a Director at the AGM. For the last four years the Institute has had the benefit of Harry's 50 years experience and keen business acumen. He will be missed.

Joining the Board are:

- **Sezer Tekbas** from GGI/Fineseat in Sydney. Sezer is an energetic Canadian with a new perspective to offer the Institute.
- **Guy Topolonsky** from Linak Australia, who is President of the Commercial Furniture Industry Association (CFIAA); and
- **Genevieve Power** from Interlink, who rejoins the board after a break.

Furntech-AFRDI Board members are volunteers who receive no payment and, with the exception of the consumer representative nominated by the Federal Minister for Consumer Affairs, pay their own way to Board meetings. A full list of Board members is available on the website.

### New Laboratory Manager, Ian Burton

Ian Burton has been appointed Laboratory Manager at Furntech-AFRDI. Ian is a mechanical engineer from New Zealand with experience in researching timber structures and joints. He is responsible for all aspects of the operation of the laboratory – testing, certification, inspection and research.

Ian replaces the popular Fred Frost who has moved on to become a consulting engineer. Fred made a significant contribution to the laboratory during his two years as Manager.

Information on Furntech's staff is available on the website [www.furntech.org.au](http://www.furntech.org.au)



*Ian Burton*

### Website New Look

The Institute's website [www.furntech.org.au](http://www.furntech.org.au) has been described as the organisation's third biggest asset (after the expertise of its staff and the Blue Tick certification trademark).

The site is attracting many thousands of visitors each year, most of whom download documents from the huge pile available. If you stacked up the printed documents available the pile would be 5 cm high and hundreds of pages.

The most popular information on the site is the list of certified products. The big change proposed to these lists is the addition of copies of the certificates (including photos) of each product.

It is planned that from 1 May 2003 all new products added to the lists will automatically have the certificate available for viewing and downloading.



[www.furntech.org.au](http://www.furntech.org.au)

### Filing Cabinet Standard Progresses

We are pleased to report that the Standards Australia Working Group established to consider a new Australian Standard for filing cabinets met in October and unanimously decided to adopt the US (BIFMA) standard for vertical and lateral filing cabinets and for mobile pedestals.

Drafts will be issued for public comment shortly and it is hoped that the process will be complete by the end of 2003.

In the meantime, the BIFMA Standards are specified for Blue Tick certification of filing cabinets and pedestals.

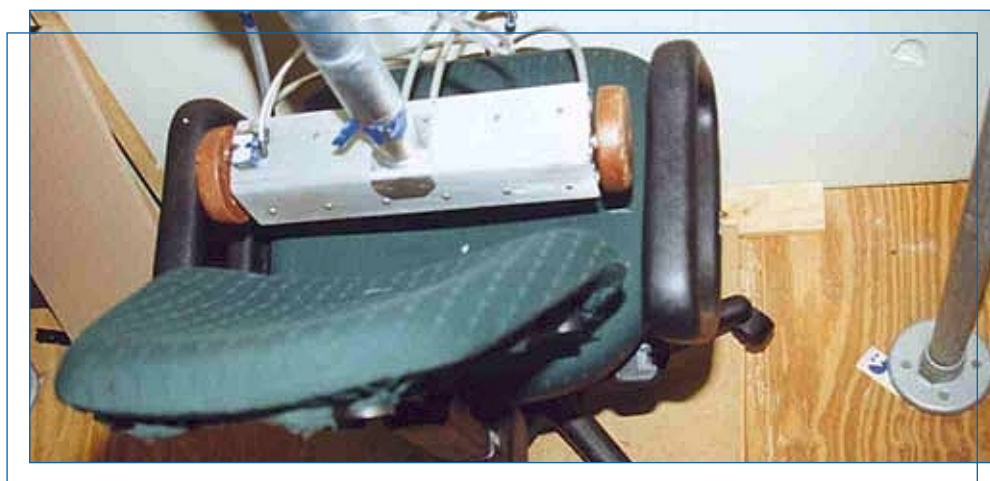
### Blue Tick Criteria for Level 6 Chairs

A number of chair suppliers have expressed concern about lightweight mechanisms being used on chairs intended for severe applications (police stations, guardrooms, etc).

The first step is the collection of data on the failure of Level 6 chairs in the field. Information has been collected and is currently being evaluated.

When the process is complete we will review whether changes to the Blue Tick Certification Criteria are required.

### Review of Office Chair Arm Tests



*"The arm strength tests in the Australian office chair standard have caused many problems and solutions are being considered."*

Another area of the Blue Tick Criteria under review relates to arms for office chairs. The static load tests in the Australian/New Zealand standard are taken from the British standard which was first drafted some time ago when chair arms were invariably rigid. The modern trend towards adjustable and flexible arms has made this test problematic – the requirement is to impose a downward force on a moving arm which is not easy for testing officers and less repeatable than we would like. The proposal now being considered is to use the arm tests from the European standard which Testing staff believe is of equivalent severity but much easier to apply.



*The Blue Tick Certification Trademark – products that meet the Australian Standard or best overseas standard*

### What “Meeting the Standard” Means?

A recent furniture tender has given rise to a spate of questions about the meaning of compliance with standards. In this case the purchasing organisation specified that products had to comply with the relevant Australian standard. That is fine as far as it goes but if you want to be technical there are no products available anywhere in Australia that can show compliance with every part of that particular standard. Most furniture standards have tests for every aspect of the product and not all of the testing is relevant or necessary. For example, the office chair standard specifies tests for upholstery covers. Furntech-AFRDI sees no sense in testing the fabric on office chairs sent for testing given that the chair will be sold with any number of the thousands of fabric options available.

Similarly, we do not conduct the surface tests on desks and workstations nor are acoustics tests required for Blue Tick Certification of screen systems: it would double the cost of testing and would add little value for the vast bulk of purchasers. On the Blue Tick certificate the “exclusions” are detailed “This product complies with the standard except for ...”

In effect, the AFRDI Blue Tick criteria reflects what aspects of the standard are valued by the market. The wording of the criteria is currently being reviewed to ensure that the meaning is clear.

**The takeout for specifiers is** that it is easier to specify that products be “certified to the Australian Standard” rather than “meet the Australian Standard”.

The fact that the Institute monitors the on-going compliance of certified products is a significant bonus.

Free advice on certifying furniture standards is available on **1800 686 789**.



### Joint Approach on Residential Standards

Furntech-AFRDI and the Furnishing Industry Association (FIAA) have agreed to take a joint approach to a range of standards-related issues concerning residential furniture. The new national FIAA structure includes a Standards Committee which will deal with the range of standards and safety issues facing the residential furniture sector including glass in furniture, flammability, tall furniture, recliner chairs, bunk beds and the future of the FIAA Furnishing Quality Program.

### Inspection Service

The Institute's Consumer Inspection Service continues to grow steadily and looks like becoming Furntech's most important contribution to the residential furniture sector. At the end of the first six months we found that the service was breaking even – something the business plan did not envisage until the middle of 2003.

A brochure has been developed promoting the Service, copies of which will be posted to everyone on our mailing lists (about 4,500).



*Kristine Lord*

### Bunk Beds

The mandatory safety standard for bunk beds came into force on 1 November 2002. A quick review of bunks available in Sydney and Melbourne stores shows that there are many products being sold illegally.

Discussions have been arranged with the primary enforcement body, the ACCC, to consider the Institute's role in improving conformance and better promotion of the new regulation.

We have written to over 600 boarding schools and hostels around Australia offering a consultancy service to check the compliance of bunk beds and to assist in designing changes. A similar offer has been made to the TT Line sailing between Melbourne and Tasmania. While the regulation does not apply to people providing accommodation, the new Standard effectively "lifts the bar" should claims be made. There is a legal precedent that schools and other institutions are under an obligation to provide an environment for their charges that meets appropriate standards. With bunk beds it is not a matter of if someone will fall out but when and how badly they will be injured.



*The new "Orange Tick" for certified residential and nursery furniture products.*

### Kitchen Standard

Furntech has accepted an invitation to join a Standards Australia Committee reviewing the national standards for kitchens.

The existing standard is based on old British requirements. We have certified two kitchen ranges (Sydney/Wholesale Kitchens and Australian Kitchen Industries) so the two largest kitchen suppliers are Blue Tick certified.

A review of the kitchen standard and greater marketing effort in the kitchen industry was identified as an area of growth potential in the 2001 strategic planning process.

### Recliner Chairs

The implementation date for the Guidelines on Recliner Chair Safety issued by the NSW Minister for Fair Trading was originally set at March 2003 but the unexpected delay in achieving the necessary changes to the most popular recliner mechanisms is causing the Department to reconsider.

Furntech offers a "Certificate of Assessment" for mechanism suppliers which tells recliner manufacturers what they need to do to ensure that a chair with that mechanism complies with the guidelines.

For chair manufacturers the Institute offers a "Certificate of Compliance" for those recliners found to comply.

Information on the Guidelines and how industry can best respond is available from Furntech on **03 6326 6155** or from **[www.furntech.org.au](http://www.furntech.org.au)**

### Furniture Flammability

The NSW Product Safety Committee recently issued a report on its inquiry into furniture containing polyurethane foam.

The report recommended that no mandatory requirements be introduced but that the furniture industry consider self-regulation to promote warning labels and inclusion of basic flammability standards in the Furnishing Quality Program.

Furntech will work closely with the FIAA to develop an industry response to the report.



### Safebaby Code Review

The Technical Reference Group (TRG) of the Infant & Nursery Products Association (INPAA) has accepted the outline of the proposed changes to the legal basis of the Safebaby Code, the industry's product safety certification program. Furntech is contracted by INPAA to independently assess nursery products against the criteria laid down by Kidsafe.

At the request of the TRG the Institute has also developed ways in which new products can be given interim assessments early in the product development process (soon after they are tested) so that the Safebaby Code tags or stickers can be approved for the first commercial shipments of the new products.

### Proposed National Furniture Injury Study

In conjunction with the three sector associations (INPAA, FIAA and CFIAA), Furntech-AFRDI is proposing to ask the Australian Government to fund a proper investigation into furniture-related injuries in Australia.

The study would provide some real data for standards committees and consumer safety regulators to understand and to face safety issues with furniture.

It is hoped that the study will be funded under the Furniture Industry Action Agenda with the Australian Government.



*"The Safebaby Code mark – the nursery furniture industry's assurance of safety"*