

# AFA INDUSTRY BULLETIN

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Australian Furniture Association Inc.  
[www.australianfurniture.org.au](http://www.australianfurniture.org.au)

## A timely reminder: domestic furniture stability standards

Dear Members,

### Coroner's Report and Recommendations

Recently the Coroners Court of Victoria investigated the tragic death of a young girl that became trapped after a chest of drawers tipped over onto her.

The AFA takes the safety of children very seriously. Following a previous inquest into the death of a toddler involving furniture, the Australian Furniture Association ("AFA") lobbied for further action to be taken to avoid further deaths.

The AFA is aware that the ACCC is now examining options for improving the safety of a range of furniture items including drawers, wardrobes and bookshelves/bookcases. The ACCC is seeking advice from industry. The AFA supports this initiative and encourages members to provide feedback. This will help identify measures that are appropriate for the industry.

The Coroner, in considering the circumstances surrounding the young girl's death, made several recommendations to improve safety. One of the recommendations is that the Australian/New Zealand Standard 4935:2009, 'Domestic furniture – Freestanding chests of drawers, wardrobes and bookshelves/bookcases – Determination of stability' ("Standard") be introduced as a mandatory standard. Other recommendations were around mandatory information to be provided by retailers and a public awareness campaign to be undertaken by the ACCC.

### Domestic furniture stability standards

The Standard covers freestanding wardrobes and chests of drawers that are over 500mm tall as well as freestanding bookshelves and bookcases that are over 600mm tall. The Standard:

- provides guidelines for stability testing of relevant furniture to be performed by a laboratory accredited to ISO/IEC 17025 and its scope of accreditation shall include reference to the Standard. Currently, the only certified tester for the Standard is Furntech AFRDI, based in Tasmania;
- makes recommendations as to the labelling of furniture so as to adequately warn of the risk of the furniture becoming unstable. The Standard sets out labels both for furniture that has passed the test requirements and for furniture that has not been tested or does not comply with the requirements. Members can obtain labels from AFA; and

- makes a recommendation that all furniture items, including those that pass the stability tests, are sold together with attachment devices such as angle brackets or webbing that are suitable for attachment of the furniture to a structural component of the building, together with adequate attachment instructions.

The Standard may be purchased online from SAI GLOBAL at <https://infostore.saiglobal.com>

#### **Where to from here**

The AFA will keep its members informed of any developments. However, in the meantime, it provides the following advice and guidance.

While the Standard is not mandatory, that does not mean that there is no level of safety to which furniture must comply. All goods sold must be safe. It is clear that furniture can pose a real risk. There have now been thirteen deaths of children under 16 years of age from similar circumstances.

So, whilst the Standard is voluntary, it provides at least a minimum level of practice that should be followed. The AFA urges all manufacturers of freestanding chests of drawers, wardrobes, bookcases and bookshelves to:

- become acquainted with the Standard and its recommendations;
- review the furniture's design to determine whether improvements may be made to the furniture's stability;
- review testing procedures to ensure that the risk of furniture tip-over is minimised;
- review instructions and labelling practices to ensure maximum awareness of end users of the risk of furniture tip-over (as a minimum, consider labelling products in accordance with the labelling procedures for items that have not been tested);
- consider having all new and existing furniture tested by an accredited tester; and
- provide brackets or webbing to be installed with the furniture to prevent tip-over.

-- ENDS --

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