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NEW AUSTRALIAN STANDARD HELPS PROTECT AGAINST FALLING FURNITURE

A new Australian Standard to test the stability of household furniture will help to prevent children's injuries and fatalities in the home.

Standards Australia has today published a new Australian Standard for evaluating the stability of freestanding domestic furniture such as bookcases, chests of drawers and wardrobes which may have a tendency to topple when misused.

The test methods outlined in *AS 4935-2009 Domestic Furniture – Determination of stability* are designed to assess furniture stability to help reduce the likelihood of furniture items tipping and causing injury or death to users, particularly children.

The need to develop an Australian Standard for furniture stability was prompted by the deaths of two children in Western Australia several years ago. According to the Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit, almost 200 children under five are taken to hospital emergency departments each year as a result of furniture falling on them.

In order to reduce the probability of furniture tipping, the new Australian Standard focuses on stability performance tests for freestanding chests of drawers over 500mm high, wardrobes over 500mm high and bookshelves and bookcases over 600mm high. It specifically addresses stability performance in relation to hazards associated with children climbing on furniture.

"In and around the home, furniture may not always be used for its intended purposes, particularly if you have young children. To a child, a bookcase or chest of drawers makes an attractive ladder or climbing apparatus to reach something high. In many cases, the weight of a small child climbing up a bookcase is enough to topple it causing serious injury," said Mr Colin Blair, Deputy CEO of Standards Australia.

"With this in mind, our Committee considered a range of scenarios and tipping risks which may occur as a result of misuse and developed specific tests to evaluate stability and balance."

Mr Blair said the Australian Standard also covers recommended labelling and marking requirements including labels for items that have passed the test, warning labels for non-complying furniture, instructions for safe use and suggested attachments such as wall brackets and braces to secure furniture.

The Standard also notes that not all stability risks are addressed and some furniture items meeting this Standard may still tip over, particularly when placed on carpet, uneven or sloping floor or when subjected to extreme use.

To help minimise risks around the home, Standards Australia suggests the following practical tips:

- Look for furniture that complies with the Australia Standard;
- Choose storage furniture with a broad and stable base instead of legs, and make sure the drawers do not fall out easily;
- Road-test furniture in the shop – when buying a chest of drawers, pull out the top drawers and apply a little pressure to see how sturdy they are;

- Select tables that will not tip if you sit on them. Glass tables should be made with thick, toughened glass;
- Choose stable chairs with non-slip legs;
- Look for tables and other furniture with rounded edges, or use corner protectors on sharp edges
- Keep unstable furniture away from where children play;
- Secure tall furniture (over 1 metre) to a wall using braces or brackets;
- Install locking devices on drawers to prevent children opening them and using them as a step ladder; and
- Supervise children at all times.

The Standard was developed by Standards Australia's Commercial and Domestic Furniture Committees CS-088 and CS 091, comprising representatives from:

- Australian Postal Corporation
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Australian Industry Group
- Australian Retailers Association
- Business New Zealand
- Department of Commerce, Consumer Protection Division, WA
- Ergonomics Society of Australia
- Furnishing Industry Association of Australia
- Furnishing Association of New Zealand
- Furntech-AFRDI
- Ministry of Consumer Affairs, New Zealand
- National Occupational Health & Safety Commission
- National Supply Group
- New Zealand Ergonomics Society
- Plastics and Chemical Industries Association
- Plastics New Zealand

The Standard will be available from Standards Australia's distributor, SAI Global from Tuesday 17 November, 2009.

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