



## AHFA STATEMENT ON *CONSUMER REPORTS* FURNITURE STABILITY REPORT

May 4, 2018

On March 22, 2018, *Consumer Reports* published results of an investigation into furniture stability and the effectiveness of the ASTM International voluntary furniture stability standard, F2057-17. The investigation included testing 24 products from 10 companies. The magazine published a follow-up report on May 3, adding test results for six additional products – two of which came from a manufacturer not in the first sample.

According to *Consumer Reports*, the impetus for conducting their research and producing the furniture stability report was new data provided by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and referenced in the CPSC’s November 2017 Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding clothing storage unit (CSU) tip overs.

The new data is contained in a table produced by CPSC mathematical statistician Adam Suchy and presented for the first time to the ASTM Subcommittee on Furniture Safety on March 8. It shows the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) estimated number of clothing storage unit tip-over injuries to children, by year, 2006 through 2016. From 2010 to 2016, Suchy reports: “*there is a significant linear trend in the decreasing number of estimated (emergency department) visits by children due to CSU tip-over incidents.*” In contrast to this “linear trend,” the table shows a dramatic 33 percent increase in incidents involving children under 6 from 2015 to 2016. From this, *Consumer Reports* concluded: “The tip-over problem is epidemic.”

### **AHFA STATEMENT**

**About the data:** The CPSC table showing an increase in the estimated injuries to children under 6 in 2016 warrants a detailed analysis. A similar trend is not evident in any other available CPSC or NEISS data. In fact, in the same November 2017 report, CPSC reports that the annual number of fatalities to children under age 18 associated with CSU tip-overs declined from a high of 20 in 2011 to 8 in 2016. (Unlike injuries, which is an estimated number, the fatalities reported are actual incidents.)

Based on the significance of the unexplained hike in estimated injuries from 2015 to 2016, AHFA asked CPSC for the NEISS data used to create the table. In the past, CPSC has provided this background data without hesitation. In this instance, however, CPSC declined, forcing AHFA to file a Freedom of Information Act request for the data following the March 8 meeting.

**On May 2, AHFA finally received the requested data.** It is important for industry to understand the details behind the increase if any meaningful conclusion is to be drawn from this new data. AHFA cautions media outlets from drawing highly speculative conclusions based solely on one data point, when all other available data shows incidents trending downward. AHFA also notes that NEISS injury data reflects an *estimate* of injuries, NOT actual injuries, as *Consumer Reports* claimed in its May 3 report.

NEISS collects data from approximately 100 hospitals selected as a representative sample of the more than 5,000 U.S. hospitals with emergency departments. CPSC analysts then make national estimates of injuries based on the data from the sample hospitals. For example, in 2015, NEISS collected information on 125 actual emergency department visits related to furniture tipping over. From this, CPSC analysts estimated 2,800 injuries nationwide. In 2016, NEISS collected information on 134 actual emergency department visits related to furniture tipping over. From this, CPSC analysts estimated 4,000 injuries nationwide. It is relevant that CPSC analysts estimate, based on the data collected, that **95% of all these injuries were treated and released, observed and released, or left the emergency department with no treatment needed.** This is another fact omitted by *Consumer Reports*.

Clearly, there was an increase in the number of injuries associated with clothing storage furniture in 2016. AHFA is committed to examining the data and determining whether there are hazard patterns within that data that can be addressed to improve child safety.

AHFA has worked with furniture manufacturers, child safety advocates and the CPSC for nearly two decades on safety measures to increase the stability of bedroom storage furniture and to reduce the number of furniture tip-over accidents involving clothing storage units. *Every* injury and fatality should be investigated to determine whether there are hazard patterns that can be addressed to improve child safety.

AHFA member companies have led the industry in making significant product modifications to achieve improved stability, and AHFA favors increased **enforcement** of the voluntary standard to ensure all manufacturers make the same product modifications.

**About the ASTM voluntary furniture stability standard:** *Consumer Reports* describes the current furniture stability standard (ASTM F2057-17) as “weak” and says it “leaves too many children at risk.” *Consumer Reports* calls for the tip-over test weight to be increased from 50 pounds (95<sup>th</sup> percentile weight of a 60-month-old child) to 60 pounds (95<sup>th</sup> percentile weight for a 72-month-old child) to address this weakness.

According to CPSC data, between 2000 and 2016, there were six fatalities that fit *Consumer Reports*’ narrow target of a 5- to 6-year-old child. Five of those involved a television falling. During the same period, 93% of all child fatalities involved youngsters age 5 and under ... the target of the current standard.

All incidents involve a multitude of factors, but since *Consumer Reports* chose to focus on the weight used in the stability testing, it must be emphasized that ***the current standard addresses the weight of children involved in 93% of all fatal incidents between 2000 and 2016.*** Further, none of these fatal incidents is known to have involved furniture that complies with the F2057 voluntary stability standard.

**About the testing:** *Consumer Reports* said it tested products representing “a cross-section of the retail market.” In its first report, *Consumer Reports* tested products from only 10 different companies, six of which have representatives on the ASTM Furniture Safety Subcommittee and,

therefore, are more likely to have products that meet or exceed the current safety standard. At least 75% of the tested units (18 of 24) were from ASTM Furniture Safety Subcommittee members. With a sample heavily weighted to favor companies that are aware of the voluntary safety standard, *Consumer Reports* concluded “manufacturers can make dressers stable enough to meet a tougher standard because many already do.”

In its second round of testing, *Consumer Reports* tested six more dressers, but only two came from a manufacturer not included in the first round of testing. The new manufacturer, like the majority of the sample, has representatives on the ASTM Furniture Safety Subcommittee.

In both rounds of testing, *Consumer Reports* devised its own 50-pound test, applying weight to drawers only after they were fully extended, even when an “outstop” was present to help prevent children from fully extending the drawer. The current ASTM furniture stability standard calls for all drawers or pullout shelves, or both, to be extended to the outstop, or in absence of such feature, to 2/3 of their operational sliding length.

In contrast to the *Consumer Reports* results, CPSC staff tested 61 clothing storage units from 25 distinct manufacturers/importers in September 2016 and found 50% did not comply with the voluntary ASTM stability standard.<sup>1</sup>

During a May 4 meeting of the ASTM Furniture Safety Subcommittee, Don Huber, director of product safety for *Consumer Reports*, emphasized that the magazine tested “for comparison, not for compliance.”

### **AHFA Conclusions**

1. The *Consumer Reports* article on the stability of clothing storage furniture describes furniture tip-overs as “epidemic.” But available data suggests incidents are declining, not increasing. CPSC reports “a significant linear trend in the decreasing number of estimated (emergency department) visits by children due to (clothing storage unit) tip-over incidents.” CPSC also reports steadily declining fatalities involving children and furniture tip-overs.

Only one data point – an *estimate* of injuries for 2016 – disrupts the otherwise consistent downward trend in furniture tip-over injuries and fatalities. AHFA is investigating the data, *which it did not receive until May 2*, to determine whether the estimate was calculated differently, or whether there are identifiable reasons for the increase.

2. *Consumer Reports* maintains that the current voluntary stability standard is “weak” because it “leaves too many children at risk.” CPSC data, however, shows that the current stability standard targets the most at-risk children, those age 5 and under, who are the victims in 93% of reported fatalities involving children and more than 81% of estimated injuries.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Staff%20Briefing%20Package%20on%20Furniture%20Tipover%20-%20September%2030%202016.pdf>

3. Finally, Don Huber, director of product safety for *Consumer Reports*, stated at the May 4 meeting of the ASTM Furniture Safety Subcommittee, that the magazine developed its testing methodology to “test for comparison, not for compliance.”

This “comparative testing” provided no evidence that a clothing storage unit tested at 60 pounds is safer than a clothing storage unit tested at 50 pounds.

The “comparative testing” provided no evidence that manufacturers could “easily” meet a new 60-pound test; it revealed only that the majority of manufacturers in the *Consumer Reports* sample of 11 could meet a 60-pound test.

The “comparative testing,” since it did not replicate the performance requirements of the voluntary standard, was misleading to consumers, pointing to a false perception of compliance.

Finally, this “comparative testing” – which draws no conclusions or correlations between a 60-pound test and improved safety – cannot be used to force a change in the voluntary stability standard, which requires a testing methodology that can be repeated consistently throughout a global supply chain by hundreds of manufacturers across thousands of different product variations.

The ASTM Subcommittee on Furniture Safety has many task groups working to improve the voluntary furniture stability standard and investigating all available data for information that could lead to improved product safety. AHFA and its member companies support the work of the Subcommittee, in particular its reliance on data collected by CPSC rather than informal “comparison testing” by a consumer publication. AHFA and its member companies call on the CPSC to support the subcommittee’s efforts by ***enforcing the voluntary standard*** and continuing to remove non-compliant products from the marketplace.