

Changes Proposed for Furniture Stability Standard in 2019

December 6, 2018 - HIGH POINT, N.C. - The ASTM International subcommittee that oversees the furniture industry's voluntary stability standard for clothing storage units met in November and agreed in principle to expand the scope of the standard to cover clothing storage furniture under 30 inches.

The ASTM F15.42 Furniture Safety Subcommittee could vote on the change as early as January, reports Bill Perdue, vice president of regulatory affairs for the American Home Furnishings Alliance (AHFA) and a member of the subcommittee.

When the voluntary stability standard was adopted in 2000, the minimum height requirement was intended to shield nightstands from the tip-over testing requirements in the standard. These smaller, lighter-weight pieces, which often had only one drawer, were not deemed a hazard at that time.

However, over the last decade, larger nightstands, some of which function as small dressers, have become common in bedroom collections. At the same time, lower profile dressers have become popular in the marketplace, meeting a demand for both lower cost and smaller space storage solutions.

In August 2015, the AHFA hosted an all-day furniture safety symposium in High Point, N.C., to discuss a wide range of tip-over issues, including the minimum height requirement in the voluntary stability standard. Officials from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), ASTM International, UL, three national child safety organizations, four industry trade associations and more than 40 manufacturers of residential and commercial furniture attended the event.

Following the symposium, five task groups were created to address issues identified as top priorities. Among them was a review of the 30-inch minimum height requirement in the voluntary standard.

"Each task group was balanced with representation from a consumer group, CPSC and industry, and all were charged with reporting back to the full Furniture Safety Subcommittee at its April 2016 meeting," recalled Perdue, who was chairman of the ASTM Furniture Safety Subcommittee at the time.

After its review, the minimum height requirement task group concluded that any clothing storage unit, regardless of height, should be a "covered product." It recommended removing the 30-inch requirement.

However, prior to the April subcommittee meeting, CPSC announced it would amend its 2016 Operating Plan to fund a briefing package with additional tip-over data to guide proposed changes to the standard. In light of this proposed briefing package, the recommendation to remove the height requirement in the voluntary standard was tabled by the subcommittee until the CPSC's additional data could be reviewed.

When the briefing package was released in September 2016, it recommended increasing the test weight required by the standard from 50 to 60 pounds to cover children up to age 6. It also proposed addressing weaknesses in the warning label requirement, including making the label more

“permanent,” identifying a standard location for the label to be placed, and cleaning up the language to make it more easily understood.

The briefing package did not address the minimum height requirement in the stability standard.

“The subcommittee moved forward with changes to the warning label, which were already underway following the August 2015 symposium. A new label, a method for testing the permanence of the label, and a revised introduction to the standard were all completed and approved in 2017,” Perdue noted. “But removing the minimum height requirement - a change the subcommittee had been ready to recommend - was overshadowed as CPSC turned its attention to addressing incidents involving 5- to 6-year-olds.”

In November 2017, CPSC issued an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) for a mandatory stability standard. The ANPR recommended expanding the scope of the standard to include units under 30 inches and increasing the test weight in the stability tests to 60 pounds to address incidents involving 5- to 6-year-olds.

In response to the ANPR, when the F15.42 subcommittee met in May 2018, a new minimum height task group was created, along with a second task group assigned to review other matters within the scope of the stability standard. In August, the two task groups were merged. Blake Gudbaur, an engineer with Delta Children and chair of the combined task group, reported in November that there is “broad agreement that height alone is not good criteria.” Although there are still some “finer points” to be hammered out by the task group, he said a vote to remove the 30-inch minimum height in the standard is possible as soon as January.

The ASTM F15.42 subcommittee currently has jurisdiction over four voluntary furniture standards. In addition to F2057-17, the Safety Specification for Clothing Storage Units, the subcommittee oversees:

- **F3096-14**, Performance Specification for Tip Restraints Used with Clothing Storage Units;
- **F2598-09**, Safety Specification for Clothing Storage Chests (single-compartment, box-style chests for storing blankets and linens, frequently lined with cedar); and,
- **F2813-12**, Standard Specification for Glass Used as a Horizontal Surface in Desks and Tables.