



Window Falls Roundtable
Wednesday, July 27, 1994, 9:30 a.m.-Noon
Room 410, East West Towers

Log of Meeting

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Date of Log Entry: August 16, 1994
Source of Log Entry: Susan Kyle, Ph.D., Management and Program Analyst
Office of Hazard Identification and Reduction
CPSC
Attendees: See attached list

Summary of Meeting

The meeting was convened by CPSC Chairman Ann Brown to discuss the issue of falls out of windows, particularly by young children. In her welcoming statement the Chairman emphasized that she would like to aggressively pursue solutions to this problem.

Chairman Brown briefly summarized the Commission's death and injury data on window falls. In 1991 there were 70 deaths associated with falls out of windows. About 26% of these were children age 10 and younger. There are an estimated annual 42,000 emergency room-treated injuries associated with falls and windows. This estimate includes all types of fall injuries where a window was involved, not just falls out of windows. Children age 10 and younger accounted for 35% of these types of window fall injuries. At least 30% of the fall injuries to children 10 and younger are estimated to be falls out of windows. In known falls out of windows, the approximate height of the fall was reported in about 80% of the injury cases. In these cases, over 90% of those injured fell from the second story or lower. This agrees with findings from other studies that serious injuries can occur even from relatively low heights, and that the hazard may not be confined to urban, high-rise settings.

Four invited speakers gave brief presentations which were each followed by a discussion period.

Charlotte Spiegel, Director, NYC Department of Health Window Falls Prevention, briefly described the New York City Board of Health window falls prevention law which was enacted in 1976. This law requires that window guards provided on windows in multi-family dwellings where children up to the age of 11 reside. In 1986 the law was expanded to require window fall guards whenever requested by any occupant in multi-family dwellings. In 1973 there were 192 falls from windows in New York, and 32 fatalities. In 1993, there were 48 falls and 6 fatalities.

Ms. Spiegel emphasized that differing regional characteristics, such as geography, demography, housing types, and building codes, will require specifically tailored methodologies to successfully address the hazard. She also emphasized that interventions must employ technological solutions. In addition, she stated that it is likely that window falls are underreported. She advocated changing the environment to protect children and educating everyone in contact with children about the hazard.

Heather Paul, Executive Director, National SAFE KIDS Campaign, gave a brief overview of the SAFE KIDS organization which is dedicated to reducing the number of unintentional injuries to children, mainly through information and education campaigns. They have 165 coalitions at the state and local levels. SAFE KIDS is planning an upcoming falls prevention program which will include a national survey of parental knowledge and attitudes about falls in the home and recreational settings, a pediatric fact sheet on fall injuries and a tips brochure on falls prevention. One of SAFE KIDS most valuable resources is the ability to deliver safety messages widely through the media. She recommended describing the medical/societal costs of injuries as an effective way to promote injury prevention programs.

Harold Evans, Product Development Manager, Andersen Windows, described Andersen's window safety efforts. With Nichols-Homeshield, a screen manufacturer, Andersen developed a warning label for window screens. A similar generic warning label was endorsed by the Screen Manufacturers Association in 1992. Andersen has also distributed brochures on window safety, is working with the SAFE KIDS campaign, and was part of the Window Safety Study Committee (see below). Andersen also participated in the National Fire Protection Association's Learn Not to Burn Foundation's Home Security and Fire Safety Task Group considering the problems associated with illegal bars and grates on windows and doors which impede escape and rescue in emergencies such as fire.

Mr. Evans stated that there are approximately 47 million windows manufactured each year in the U.S. 66% of these are vertical sliding sash, 15% horizontal sliding sash, and 13% hinge sash. There are about 1 billion residential windows in service. Window screens, whose primary purpose is to permit air flow while keeping insects out, are not common outside of the U.S. Most reported falls from windows are from the first and second stories, most deaths are from the second and third stories. Most falls are unobserved, therefore, many of the circumstances surrounding the fall are unknown. The Uniform Building Code states that persons must be able to escape from a residence quickly in emergencies. Therefore, impediments to escape, such as windows which require a tool or special knowledge to open them, are not permitted by code.

Andersen recommends the following for addressing the hazard of falling from windows:

- implementation of the New York City solution in other large cities
- universal use of SMA warning label
- comprehensive educational program by SAFE KIDS
- building code provisions for window fall protection on fourth floor and above in dwellings expected to have small children living in them
- windows on the third floor and below should not inhibit emergency escape or rescue.

Mr. Evans emphasized the need for comprehensive, balanced solutions which would take all issues into consideration.

Dan Johnson, National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), presented a summary of the findings of the Window Safety Study Committee. This committee was formed in 1992 by Andersen, NAHB, the National Wood Window and Door Association, a fire consultant, and a representative of the International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO). The aim of the committee was to address code changes proposed to the ICBO Uniform Building Code that would require that windows with sills below a certain height have guards. This requirement would be in direct conflict with currently existing egress and natural ventilation requirements. The NAHB is concerned that emergency egress provisions not be compromised, especially since their findings indicate that entrapment deaths

outnumber fall deaths.

Issues raised in the question and answer periods following the presentations fell into four main categories.

Windows

Sill Height. In response to a question as to whether sill height should be a factor in requiring guards, Ms. Spiegel stated that her experience has been that any sill height can be hazardous. She cited an instance where a child climbed onto a chair to climb out a high bathroom window.

Window Type. In New York City most windows are double hung and most incidents involved double hung windows.

Size. It was suggested that the currently required size of the operable portion of window be reconsidered, that the current 5.7 square foot requirement may not be necessary.

Screens

There are reported incidents where a screen was present. Mr. Frank Fitzgerald reminded the group that screens are not designed to withstand any forces except those from insects and small birds. Mr Marvin Cantor stated that relying on screens as protection would not be a good idea since some people don't want screens on their windows.

Fire Egress

Several participants stressed that windows are used as means of emergency egress, especially during fires, and that all building codes require that there must be an egress window in sleeping rooms, and that multiple egresses are desirable, preferably located remote from one another. Ms. Perrault stated that more than 1000 children age 10 and under die in fires each year. Anything which is used to prevent children from falling out windows must not impede emergency egress. It was noted that in New York City fire escape windows must not have window guards.

Security

Mr. Johnson stated that there are roughly 200 deaths a year occur due to entrapment by locking window guards and security devices. These are primarily anti-burglary devices, rather than window guards to prevent children from falling out. New York City has no reports of entrapment by child window guards.

The National Ornamental and Miscellaneous Metal Association has a committee on safe egress from windows guarded by metal guarding devices which is working with building code and fire groups. They plan a session on guarding issues at their next national meeting. They are aware of numerous guarding devices which are available which don't require a special tool for operation, and are not easily operated by young children.

The need to consider personal security issues, particularly for inner city residents, was stressed.

After the presentations were completed, Chairman Brown asked for ideas about how to solve the problem of children falling from windows. She urged that the group formulate a national, united, consistent, balanced approach to the problem.

Ms. Sue Baker suggested that a performance standard for a window/screen combination be developed that would ensure that the unit would be child-proof, escape-worthy, safely cleaned on both sides from inside, reasonably priced, attractive, keep insects out, and provide a security advantages. She further suggested that a contest for architects and/or architecture students for designs for such windows be held.

Mr. Marvin Cantor, from the American Institute of Architects, stated that AIA's Building Performance and Regulations Committee had been unaware of the fall hazard. He stated that the committee has had task forces to address specific issues in the past, and that this issue would probably be of interest to the group. He also said he would recommend that the committee consider instituting a window design competition.

Dr. Heather Paul suggested that the winner of such a competition could be announced during SAFE KIDS week in May. In addition, SAFE KIDS plans a Home Safety Inventory that will list the top ten or twelve devices or behaviors that are necessary for a safe home. One of these will be falls prevention. This inventory will stimulate discussion of how to promote safe windows, including consideration of egress issues.

Mr. Frank Fitzgerald of the Screen Manufacturers Association (SMA) stated that he will recommend to SMA that they form a SAFE KIDS coalition. Earlier in the meeting, Ms. Sandra Jones, representing the electronic security industry, had also volunteered to set up a SAFE KIDS coalition.

Ms. Michelle Perrault of the National Fire Protection Agency's Learn Not to Burn Foundation stated that, to address data limitations concerning blocked exits, they have formed a Task Force on security bar issues which will develop recommendations for an incident reporting system.

Mr. Francis McGarry of the National Association of State Fire Marshals suggested that the CPSC/NASFM pilot EMS data collection project could be expanded to include data on window falls and security issues.

Ms. Sandra Jones suggested that a Clearinghouse be set up to collect known information on window falls.

Mr. Harold Evans suggested that the group prioritize education, labelling and performance standards efforts, and that smaller manufacturers need to be involved in this process. Mr. Dan Johnson suggested that specific issues for educational programs be determined.

Ms. Susan Baker stressed the need to consider both retrofit and new construction solutions.

Mr. Richard Kuchnicki of CABO stated that CABO would be happy to promote inclusion of any performance standard which might be developed.

Chairman Brown suggested formation of an Ad Hoc Committee to formulate a balanced approach which will take into account all the issues raised. The committee would consider all approaches, including new products and technology, safety education including warning labels, ways to stimulate architectural and engineering innovation, and ways to work with building codes at all levels. She asked for volunteers to serve on the committee. A list of those volunteering is attached.

It was agreed that CPSC staff would plan a meeting of the Ad Hoc Ccommittee in the Fall of 1994.

A partial tape of this meeting is available by requesting the tape of the Window Falls Meeting, July 27, 1994, from The Office of the Secretary, CPSC, Washington, DC 20207, or by calling 301 504 0800.



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