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Rock-a-bye babies

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A bill awaiting Gov. Bush's signature would have Florida become stricter in the inspection of cribs for infant safety.

Recently, an infant in Zephyrhills suffocated after a poorly secured crib bumper pad came loose and became wrapped around her neck. It's not exactly a common occurrence, but each year an estimated 13,000 infants are injured as a result of unsafe cribs. In Florida, 16 infants died in crib-related incidents between 1992 and 1997.

Although modern consumer safety standards now ensure that safer cribs are manufactured, there is nothing to prevent the sale of older cribs that don't meet specifications or those which have become unsafe due to age or deterioration — cribs with missing slats, for instance, or ones with ornamental knobs that may come loose and choke an infant.

Moreover, a recent investigation by "Dateline NBC" found that many national hotel chains commonly employ cribs that were built before newer safety standards were imposed or which are in poor condition.

In response to the concerns raised by "Dateline NBC" and by groups like the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Florida Legislature has passed a bill — the Florida Infant Crib Safety Act — that would help prevent such accidents.

Under the bill, which passed the state Senate by a 39-0 vote and the House by a vote of 102-13, the state would be empowered to conduct safety inspection of cribs in hotels and day care centers. In addition, it would prohibit the sale of cribs that do not meet national safety standards or which have become defective due to wear and tear.

"All parents, whether they can afford to buy a new crib or obtain a used one, should be able to go to sleep at night knowing that their infant will be safe," said the bill's sponsor, state Sen. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Pembroke Pines.

The bill is awaiting Gov. Jeb Bush's signature. Signing it into law would help make Florida a national leader in the fight to keep infants safe in their cradles.