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Bunk beds for the short-term rental accommodation industry

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Handbook

Bunk beds for the short-term mental accommodation industry

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PREFACE

This Handbook was prepared on behalf of Standards Australia Committee CS-003, Safety Requirements For Children's Furniture to improve safety associated with bunks within short-term commercial accommodation facilities. The project management of this Standard has been carried out by Stancert Pty Ltd, an internationally recognized provider of Standards development strategies. The primary authors of this document were Mark Bezzina, Managing Director, Stancert and Tim Wain, Project manager, Stancert.

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INTRODUCTION

This Handbook aims to provide guidance to the short-term rental accommodation industry to reduce the risk of patrons being injured by the use of unsafe bunk beds in the short-term rental accommodation industry.

This issue was highlighted as a result of an inquest in September 2008 into the 2002 death of a child in Queensland. The child died as a result of head injuries sustained when she fell from an upper bunk in a holiday rental unit, which was in place well before mandatory regulations were introduced.

The bunk bed in question did not comply with the then voluntary Australian and New Zealand Standard for bunk beds (AS/NZS 4220:1994, *Bunk beds and other elevated beds*), as it did not have a guard rail around the top bunk. AS/NZS 4220:1994, prescribed that upper bunks were to have guard rails on all four sides of the top bunk to prevent persons and especially children, from rolling out.

The National Coronial Information System reported that there were eight reported child fatalities (excluding suicides) associated with bunk beds nationwide from July 2000 to August 2007. Of these four cases were the result of strangulation.

The Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit collected data from Queensland hospital emergency departments for the period 1999 to 2007 and, as a result of this study, estimates that in Queensland there are 450 bunk bed injury presentations each year. This collection methodology only captures data from selected hospitals and is thought to represent around 25% of the total number of injuries. As such, a more accurate estimate of injuries in Queensland could be in the vicinity of 1800 presentations a year.

Data collection throughout Australia is limited but, based on QISU estimates, the true level of incidents may well be under-reported.

In November 2002, a mandatory safety Standard was introduced in Queensland under the *Fair Trading Act 1989*. The mandatory safety Standard required that all new bunk beds supplied in trade or commerce must comply with key safety features contained in the 1994 edition of the Australian and New Zealand Standard for bunk beds. The mandatory safety Standard was also made compatible with the then proposed new version of the Australian and New Zealand Standard. The new edition of the AS/NZS 4220 was published in November 2003.

At a Commonwealth level, the issue of bunk beds was addressed by Consumer Protection Notice No.1 of 2003, under the *Trade Practices Act 1974*, which also referred to certain aspects of AS/NZS 4220:1994. This regulation only applied to all bunks purchased new and did not strictly apply to existing bunk beds in commercial settings or bunks that have been in situ for many years. The suppliers of accommodation services are not covered by the mandatory regulation as the regulation only applies to the providers of bunk beds.

Compliance with the mandatory safety Standard was not made retrospective. Therefore, any bunk beds in use prior to November 2002, and which continue to be used to date, are not required to comply with the mandatory safety Standard. However, all bunks manufactured and sold commercially must comply with the mandatory regulation. Bunks sold second hand are not required to comply unless sold through commercial businesses.

The mandatory Standard only involves key safety requirements such as dimensions, markings and safety barriers and does not cover areas such as durability, stability and toxicity whereas the AS/NZS 4220 consists of more detailed design and performance requirements.

The latest edition of AS/NZS 4220 was published in April 2010. During the review and update of AS/NZS 4220, the committee responsible for the Standard, CS-003, identified the limitations of applying the household bunk bed Standard to a commercial setting. The bunk Standard, although more severe than previous editions, was not designed for high usage and environments. It recommended that a Handbook be developed specifically for application in commercial environments. The Handbook also recognizes that there may be environments where bunks are structural components of facilities and it may be more appropriate to modify bunks to bring them to a safer level using the key features of the Handbook as a guide to what may be acceptable.

It should be noted that while regulators have introduced safety regulations for new product, no regulation is applicable for bunks installed or sold prior to November 2002. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is widespread use of unsafe bunk beds in commercial settings. It can be argued that the lack of a regulation applying to bunk beds supplied prior to November 2002 discourages the implementation of safer sleeping arrangements.

The key safety issues to address with bunk beds are—

- falls from the top bunk as the result of inadequate roll out protection or users being overly adventurous; and
- hanging or being by protrusions in the area of the top bunk or (for very young children) by gaps that allowed a child to be trapped by the head.

By introducing effective risk management guidelines through using this Handbook, commercial operators may be encouraged to replace bunk beds with safer products, by having clearer guidelines on what constitutes a safe sleep environment.

1 Scope

This Handbook builds on the requirements of AS/NZS 4220:2010 and provides additional guidance for short-term accommodation providers in relation to the purchase, installation, maintenance and use of bunk beds in facilities.

This Handbook also addresses supporting systems associated with the use of bunk beds, including but not limited to:

- Accident and incident reporting related to bunk beds.
- Risk management systems.
- Programmed maintenance systems and the requirement for tenants to report defective beds.
- Pre-inspection of beds prior to use in larger facilities.
- Purchasing controls to ensure defective beds are not acquired.
- Compliance management systems.
- Environmental issues such as fire regulations, building codes and general product safety risk assessments.
- Universal Design Principles intended to make buildings, equipment, furniture and environments more accessible for persons of all ages and abilities.

This Handbook is likely to assist the following stakeholders:

- The holiday rental industry.
- Unit owners (who rent out units for monetary gain).
- Diverse community groups (who rent out or provide accommodation), including charitable organisations.
- The tourism industry (especially the backpacker industry).
- The real estate industry.
- Standards Australia Committee CS-003, Safety Requirements for Children's Furniture.
- The restricted letting agents industry.
- Government agencies that lease premises.
- Homeless hostels.
- Emergency accommodation providers.
- Health authorities.
- Government agencies that are required to provide sleep accommodation, e.g. prisons, military forces.
- Residential camp sites.
- Caravan parks.