

A Hidden Hazard in Your Home

Some furniture makers are doing it right, but children are still dying from unstable dressers that tip over. And there are no laws to help prevent future tragedies.

by Rachel Rabkin Peachman



AFTER CHURCH one Sunday afternoon in 2016, Janet McGee waited for her 22-month-old son Ted to wake from his afternoon nap. As family members busied themselves in their Apple Valley, Minn., home, McGee checked on Ted every 15 minutes or so. The last time she peeked in, Ted wasn't in bed, and she noticed the dresser toppled over.

In an instant, the horrible reality set in. "He's under there, he's under there," McGee remembers thinking. "I lifted the dresser up, and I started digging through the drawers because all of the drawers had fallen out. And there he was at the bottom. His face was purple. His eyes were half open. I screamed for

my husband to come. I started CPR on him. My 11-year-old son called 911."

Paramedics rushed Ted to the hospital, but medical staff couldn't revive him. McGee remembers holding his hand at the hospital. "It was cold, and I knew."

The weight of the dresser had suffocated the little boy. And though family members were within earshot, no one heard a crash because Ted's body absorbed the impact of the falling dresser. McGee and her husband, Jeremy, assumed their tragedy was a freakish occurrence. But they soon discovered that Ted was just one of many victims of what safety regulators categorize as a "furniture tip-over,"

a sometimes-fatal event affecting thousands of U.S. families each year. The McGees also learned the dresser, an Ikea Malm, was linked to previous tip-over deaths. Ikea did not decide to recall the product until four months after Ted died.

The tip-over problem is epidemic: Someone in the U.S. is injured every 17 minutes by a furniture, television, or appliance tip-over, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. After declining for a few years, estimated tip-over injuries for children under age 6 involving dressers and other clothing storage units increased in 2016 to 2,800 from 2,100 the year before, or

by 33 percent, according to the CPSC.

Dressers and other clothing storage units account for at least 11 percent of furniture tip-over injuries, according to the CPSC. But it's the number of tip-over deaths in the category—there were 195 reported to the CPSC between 2000 and 2016—that particularly makes it a crisis.

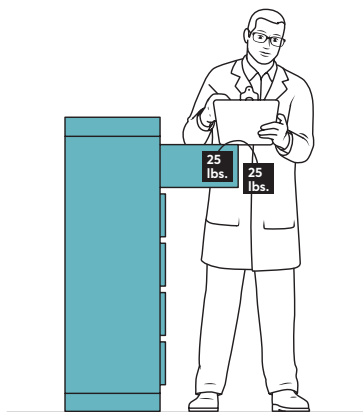
The vast majority of the victims are children under age 6. Many times, they cause the tip-over by climbing on the front of a dresser or by playing inside a drawer. Sometimes, they're alone in their room, and a parent, like Janet McGee, finds them.

To protect Ted in his home, the McGees installed safety gates, covered power outlets, and latched all cabinets—but they had never heard of a furniture tip-over. “It was just this little, tiny window of time where your life changes forever,” McGee told Consumer Reports. “Instead of planning his second birthday party that was supposed to be Elmo-themed, we were planning his funeral.”

The Truth About Tip-Overs

As it stands today, the industry operates under a voluntary tip-over testing standard—which means any dresser taller than 30 inches should stay upright with 50 pounds of weight hanging from an open drawer. Because it's voluntary, manufacturers aren't required to conduct the testing, let alone meet the standard, to sell their dressers in the U.S. Some manufacturers meet the standard or go beyond it; others fall short.

In light of the continuing danger, Consumer Reports launched an investigation to assess the stability of dressers in the marketplace. Over the course of a year, CR analyzed thousands of incident reports obtained from the CPSC through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to better understand the circumstances of injuries and deaths. CR also tested 24 different dressers, representing a cross-section of the market, to find which could pass several progressively more stringent



Deadly Furniture Tip-Overs

CR's investigation found:

Children alone in their rooms. Almost half of tip-over deaths (46 percent) happen in the bedroom, sometimes after a child has napped. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has identified certain “hazard patterns,” including children climbing on open drawers.

TV hazard. CR recommends consumers avoid placing TVs on top of dressers. The CPSC says that 53 percent of reported tip-over fatalities between 2000 and 2016 for children under 18 involved TVs and dressers tipping over together.

Weak tip-over standard. The industry's voluntary standard leaves too many children at risk. Based on our investigation, CR is calling for the tip-over test weight for dressers to be increased to 60 pounds, from 50 pounds, and for dressers 30 inches tall and shorter to be included in the standard because they also can tip over. Three of the four dressers CR tested that were 30 inches or shorter failed CR's second test.

Industry responsible. CR thinks the most effective way to prevent tip-overs is to secure dressers to walls. But we recognize it's not always an option for tenants or those not handy with tools. CR thinks it's the industry's responsibility to ensure safer, more stable dressers and that safety shouldn't rely on consumer skill at anchoring a dresser to a wall.

Some do it right. CR's test results show that manufacturers can make dressers stable enough to meet a tougher standard because many already do.

tip-over tests. Two tests were modeled after the industry's current voluntary standard, but CR also devised a more rigorous test using up to 60 pounds of weight, a higher threshold that more fully represents the weight range of U.S. children under age 6. CR also tested some dressers 30 inches and shorter, a slice of the market currently not covered by the voluntary standard.

CR's investigation concluded that the industry standard is inadequate. At the same time, a majority of the dressers CR tested passed the 60-pound test.

“Clearly, the marketplace has found that one can design a dresser at various prices that is safer and more stable,” says James Dickerson, chief scientific officer at Consumer Reports. (See “How Stable Is Your Dresser?” on page 19.)

CR's findings underscore that there isn't one formula for greater stability. However, many of the dressers that passed all of CR's tests tended to be heavier back-weighted, deeper dressers with less drawer extension. Perhaps most significantly, CR found that there's no easy way for consumers to simply eye a dresser and tell whether it is more likely to tip over. A more effective and mandatory standard would help consumers trust that dressers for sale in the U.S. would resist tipping over onto young children.

Through interviews with parents of victims and with industry representatives, CR also found the most effective prevention strategy available today, anchoring dressers to walls using brackets and straps, isn't an easy option for families less proficient with tools or contending with brick walls. Some parents told CR that they had no idea kits for anchoring dressers even existed. (See “Deadly Furniture Tip-Overs,” at left, for CR's investigative findings.)

Based on our findings, Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports, is calling on regulators to set a strong, mandatory safety standard, allowing regulators to enforce the rules and more easily gain industry cooperation for recalls. In

How Stable Is Your Dresser?

CR conducted tip-over testing on 24 different dressers that represent a cross-section of the retail market, using progressively tougher tests. They were purchased from May 2017 through February 2018. Our tests show that you can't spot a stable dresser with the naked eye.

TESTING KEY

- **PASSED**
Tests 1, 2 & 3
- **PASSED**
Tests 1 & 2
- **PASSED**
Test 1 only

Test 1 All drawers open.

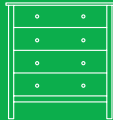
Test 2 Top drawer open with a 50-pound weight hung from the drawer-front.

Test 3 Top drawer open and the 50-pound weight is increased in 1-pound increments to a maximum of 60 pounds.

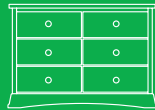
Note: All drawers are empty during the test.



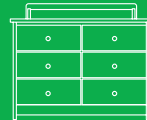
Bob's Discount Furniture Chadwick Chest \$280
H48.25"xW36"xD17"
99.0 lb.



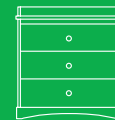
DaVinci Jayden 4-Drawer Dresser \$280
H37.75"xW36"xD18.75"
87.6 lb.



Delta Children Bentley 6 Drawer Dresser
\$340
H33.75"xW49"xD19"
111.0 lb.



Delta Children Clermont 6 Drawer Dresser \$250
H38"xW47.25"xD18.75"
111.6 lb.



Delta Children Sutton 3 Drawer Dresser \$170
H37"xW35"xD19"
83.2 lb.



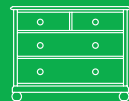
DaVinci Kalani 4-Drawer Dresser (discontinued) \$300
H38.25"xW32.75"xD21.25"
83.6 lb.



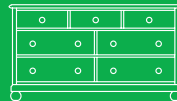
Epoch Design 5 Drawer Chest \$740
H46.25"xW33.75"xD21"
131.2 lb.



Epoch Design Seneca 5 Drawer Chest \$770
H48.25"xW35.75"xD21.25"
164.0 lb.



Pottery Barn Kids Catalina Dresser \$500
H31"xW38.5"xD18.75"
89.6 lb.



Pottery Barn Kids Catalina Extra-Wide Dresser \$900
H31.25"xW56.25"xD18"
119.2 lb.



Delta Children 3 Drawer Dresser, similar to: Viv + Rae 3 Drawer Dresser \$280
H33.5"xW37"xD20"
74.0 lb.



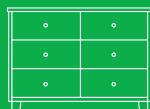
Essential Home Belmont 4 Drawer Dresser Chest (Ameriwood) \$40
H30"xW27.75"xD15.75"
47.0 lb.



Sauder Pogo 3-Drawer Chest \$180
H47.25"xW30.25"xD19.5"
99.4 lb.



Sauder Shoal Creek 4-Drawer Chest \$230
H42.5"xW34.75"xD18.75"
106.4 lb.



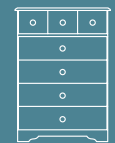
Simmons Kids Rowen Double Dresser \$300
H34"xW47.75"xD19.75"
128.2 lb.



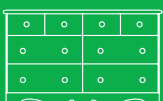
Delta Children Epic 3 Drawer Dresser \$180
H33"xW36.5"xD18.75"
71.4 lb.



South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser B \$200
H27.5"xW51.25"xD19"
108.6 lb.



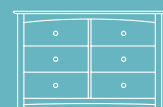
South Shore Little Treasures 5-Drawer Chest \$165
H43.75"xW31.5"xD18"
89.8 lb.



South Shore Summer Breeze 6-Drawer Double Dresser B \$230
H31.25"xW52"xD20"
113.2 lb.



Ikea Malm 3-Drawer Chest \$100
H30.5"xW31.75"xD19"
96.0 lb.



Storkcraft Kenton 6 Drawer Universal Double Dresser \$220
H32.5"xW50"xD18"
102.2 lb.



South Shore Summer Breeze 6-Drawer Double Dresser A \$270
H32"xW52.25"xD16.5"
111.6 lb.



South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser A \$200
H29.75"xW47.5"xD17.5"
103.6 lb.



South Shore Libra 3-Drawer Chest, similar to: Simply Basics 3 Drawer Dresser \$90
H27.5"xW31.5"xD16"
57.2 lb.

Notes: 1) Some models have the same name with a modifier ("A" or "B"). The latter sample (B) was found to have different dimensions from the earlier sample (A). This is reflected in both dimensions and test results. 2) Dimensions are overall dimensions of the assembled product rounded up to the nearest 1/4 inch, measured by CR technicians, including any additional components, such as a changing table or hardware. These dimensions may differ from what appears in the manufacturers' specifications. 3) Purchase price may vary from the currently available price.

the meantime, CU thinks the industry should increase the voluntary standard test weight to 60 pounds and include dressers 30 inches and shorter (see “Where CR Stands: Calling for Tougher Tip-Over Standards,” on page 21). The CR investigation comes as the CPSC this year considers issuing stricter, mandatory safety standards.

“Our recommendations would lead to safer dressers for all consumers,” says William Wallace, senior policy analyst for CU. “Raising the test weight would cover more children, and lowering the minimum height would cover more dressers.”

The Consumer's Conundrum

Under the current system, consumers must put their trust in manufacturers. “The normal consumer has no clue,” says Lisa Siefert, a consumer advocate in Barrington Hills, Ill., who founded Shane's Foundation shortly after her 2-year-old son Shane died from a dresser tip-over in 2011. Like McGee, Siefert found her son under his dresser after he had taken a nap. She had assumed the dresser was safe.

Jackie Collas' son Curren died in 2014 after a dresser tipped over onto him in his room at his West Chester, Penn., home. “I just feel like it shouldn't be left up to the consumer,” Collas says.

Keisha Bowles, of Conway, Ark., lost her 2-year-old daughter, Chance, in 2012. Chance and her then-6-year-old brother, Brandon, were playing in and out of each other's rooms. Bowles was in the bathroom when a dresser with a TV on top of it fell onto Chance, who died later from her injuries. “I had no idea that they made anything to strap down furniture,” Bowles says.

Acting Chairman of the CPSC, Ann Marie Buerkle, says it's key to educate

Manufacturers aren't required to conduct tip-over testing, let alone meet the current standard, to sell their dressers in the U.S.

consumers about securing dressers and TVs already in their homes. “Even if we put a mandatory standard into effect tomorrow, there are a lot of dressers out there that don't comply.”

Our Testing of Tip-Overs

The voluntary safety standard for dressers is managed by ASTM International, an independent organization that brings together manufacturers, government officials, academics, retailers, consumers, and others to establish standards for thousands of products and processes. (Consumer Reports is an active member and participates in working groups, including dressers.) Not all manufacturers participate, and not all comply with its voluntary standards.

In CR's investigation, the Pottery Barn, Epoch Design, and Sauder models we evaluated, among others, passed all three of CR's tests. Other models from various manufacturers passed the first two tests but failed our tougher, third test. Five models from three manufacturers—Ameriwood (one model), DaVinci (one model), and South Shore (three models)—did not pass CR's second test.

Ameriwood and South Shore told CR their dressers meet voluntary industry standards. Three of the four dressers from these manufacturers that failed CR's second test were 30 inches or

shorter and would not be subject to the industry's voluntary standard.

DaVinci told CR in an email that the company has already discontinued the model that didn't pass the second test because the company adopted a new 55-pound internal test. “Any items that did not pass were either discontinued or underwent construction changes, which include thicker, heavier back panels,” the email says.

CR's testing shows that the industry in many cases could already meet a tougher standard, with 13 of 24 dressers passing the 60-pound test.

Impact on Industry

Still, meeting a new standard would not be a simple adjustment, says Joe Shamie, co-president of Delta Children, a global manufacturer of cribs, furniture, baby gear, and dressers. Shamie says it would mean redesigning dressers and probably additional per-unit costs for back weights and extra shipping charges from Asia. “As it is right now, my costs are more expensive than the guy that does not pass the [voluntary] standards,” he says. “If they make the [voluntary] standards tougher, my costs will continue to go up, while his costs will continue to be much lower than mine.”

Shamie, who considers himself a dedicated safety advocate, estimates Delta's budget for safety testing is \$2 million a year. “The company culture is set around safety and corporate and social responsibility,” says Shamie, whose father started the business in 1968. “It's not about the letter of the law; it's about using a combination of some common sense and seeing how it could apply further. Because children do things that we don't anticipate.”

Five of the dresser models CR tested were from Delta. Three passed all three tests, and two passed Tests 1 and 2 but failed CR's 60-pound test.

In addition to Delta, CR contacted dozens of other furniture manufacturers and retailers to ask a series of questions about design changes, testing,



To see the video about how to properly anchor your dresser to a wall, go to [CR.org/tipover](https://www.consumerreports.org/tipover).

and current safety standards. Of the 13 manufacturers that responded in full and also produce dressers, eight said they want a mandatory standard. Why? “To keep consumers safe and require a level playing field across all suppliers,” David P. DaPonte, senior manager of global quality assurance and testing at L.L.Bean, said in a written response.

Laura Wood, international sourcing coordinator at Lexington Home Brands, says a mandatory standard would eliminate confusion and debate. “Incidents continue to occur because compliance with the standard, and more specifically understanding of the standard, is not consistent,” she says. “I think [issuing a mandatory standard] could certainly clarify for industry that a mandatory standard is mandatory—you have to do it.”

Who Should Be Protected?

Consumer advocates, including CR, think setting a new tip-over testing standard that is reasonable should be based on protecting more at-risk children. A mandatory, 60-pound standard would cover about 95 percent of U.S. children under 6 years of age—a group involved in 82 percent of dresser and clothing storage unit tip-over deaths, according to the CPSC.

Even so, some in the industry say the current voluntary standard is working and that tip-over mishaps will happen, regardless of new laws or standards.

“Do I think the standard is adequate? Yes, I do believe it’s adequate in protecting the most affected at-risk population,” says Bill Perdue, vice president of regulatory affairs for the American Home Furnishings Alliance, a 400-member industry trade group. “I do, however, believe that there’s always room to improve the standard.”

Perdue contends that tip-over deaths and injuries are largely due to non-compliant products. Tip-over incident reports don’t usually include the dresser model involved, so it’s hard to tell which specific models are responsible for the incidents. But in the case of fatalities,

some dresser models are singled out for scrutiny by regulators and the industry.

In the case of Ted McGee’s death, the Ikea Malm dresser that fell on him was still on the market when he died in February 2016, even though it and another Malm model were linked to the deaths of two toddlers in 2014. Those two families each filed a lawsuit against Ikea in 2015 and also reported the incidents to the CPSC. That same year, Ikea issued free anchor kits and urged consumers to stop using Ikea dressers (27 million at the time) until secured to walls. It wasn’t until June 2016, four months after Ted’s death, that Ikea issued a recall for the Malm.

The McGees sued Ikea in August that year, and the company settled with them and the other two families that December. Ikea didn’t respond to CR requests for comment about Ted’s

death. But the company stressed in email responses to CR that all Ikea dressers should be secured to walls.

Elliot Kaye, commissioner and past chairman of the CPSC, says having a mandatory standard tends to speed up the recall process. In many cases, the CPSC doesn’t have the practical resources to quickly force recalls and must either successfully sue or gain industry cooperation.

“With a voluntary standard, where really there’s no enforcement mechanism whatsoever, it’s truly voluntary. Basically what [many in the industry] are saying is let’s wait until more children are killed before we have to do anything, and that to me is—that’s morally reprehensible,” Kaye says. “I’m not comfortable waiting ... when we know that there are concrete changes that can be made now that will save lives.”



WHERE CR STANDS: CALLING FOR TOUGHER TIP-OVER STANDARDS

Consumer Reports recommends that consumers anchor dressers to the wall. But CR also is calling on regulators to set stronger, mandatory tip-over testing standards. In the meantime, industry should take steps to strengthen the current voluntary standard in these key ways:

Protect more children. The current standard—an empty dresser must not tip over when 50 pounds is hung from an open drawer—doesn’t cover enough children and should be increased to 60 pounds, which would cover 95 percent of children under age 6, according to the

Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Include shorter dressers. The standard should be expanded to cover units 30 inches tall and shorter because CR’s investigation shows that some of these dressers can tip over.

Labeling. If the standard is strengthened, as we recommend, manufacturers should clearly mark products to reflect that they meet the new standard.

Congress should act, if needed. If manufacturers don’t agree to toughen the voluntary standard, the CPSC should issue a mandatory standard. This process could take years without

industry cooperation. Congress, however, could speed things up. The STURDY (Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth) Act, introduced in 2016 by Sens. Bob Casey (D-Pa.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), and Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), and Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), would have directed the CPSC to issue a stronger, mandatory standard if industry failed to adequately strengthen its voluntary standard within 180 days. Unfortunately, the bill did not pass. Policy makers and industry should act quickly on our findings and issue a tougher standard.