

# Dangerous Dressers in Our Homes

CR's investigation reveals that even furniture 30 inches or shorter can tip over and be deadly to children.

By Rachel Rabkin Peachman



Demonstration of furniture stability testing we conduct on dressers 30 inches and under.

**EVEN THOUGH** a dresser is low to the floor and seems stable, it still could pose a deadly tip-over risk to children at home, a Consumer Reports investigation has found.

Currently, dressers sold in the U.S. aren't governed by a mandatory stability standard and aren't required to pass any premarket tip-over tests. Instead, the industry has a voluntary safety standard, and it's up to

individual manufacturers to decide whether or not they will meet it.

Even so, the treatment of shorter dressers represents a potentially deadly loophole in the industry's voluntary standard. The standard says that dressers taller than 30 inches should stay upright with 50 pounds of weight hanging from any open drawer when the other drawers are closed and the dresser is empty. Dressers that are

30 inches tall and under are exempt.

As part of CR's continuing look into furniture tip-overs—including an extensive review of incident reports from



WATCH

To see a demonstration of our furniture stability testing on dressers, watch our video at [CR.org/tipover](https://www.consumerreports.org/tipover).

the federal government—we uncovered six examples of deaths involving dressers 30 inches and under, including an incident from 2017. We also tested a group of short dressers in our labs and found that many of them tipped over. (See our test results on page 21.)

CR evaluated 17 dressers marketed as measuring 30 inches tall and under. Nine—or more than half—failed all but one of the tests. Five dressers passed all our tests, including an Ikea dresser costing \$150, demonstrating that it's possible to produce a stable, affordable dresser at this height.

“As it stands now, a manufacturer following the industry standard can legitimately say that its lineup of dressers is compliant with the standard, even if it manufactures one of these low dressers that has been shown to pose risk of injury or death to children,” says James Dickerson, CR’s chief scientific officer. “Our results demonstrate why a standard that includes dressers 30 inches and shorter is both feasible and necessary.”

Our overall findings highlight the need for strong safety standards for all dressers, not just taller ones.

The need is urgent because every 17 minutes an unsecured piece of furniture, appliance, or television tips over and injures—or kills—someone in the U.S., according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the government agency with oversight of household products. And research shows that dressers and other clothing storage units are particularly lethal, accounting for at least 206 reported deaths since the year 2000. Most of the victims of dresser tip-overs are children younger than 6 years old.

## An Unimaginable Tragedy

Brett Horn’s son Charlie, a triplet, died in 2007 after a 30-inch dresser fell on him. Horn says he couldn’t have imagined that the low dresser in his son’s room would be so dangerous.

That day, Charlie, 2½, woke from a nap in the bedroom he shared with



Charlie Horn, 2½, died in 2007 after a dresser 30 inches high fell on him in his home.

# 206

The number of reported deaths from tip-over incidents involving dressers and other clothing storage units.

Source: Consumer Product Safety Commission, from 2000 through 2017.

his brother. Investigators think that he opened the bottom-left drawer of the dresser. It’s unclear exactly what happened, but the dresser tipped over onto him.

Charlie’s body “cushioned the fall of the dresser, so there was no loud noise when the dresser fell,” the CPSC incident report says. It was so quiet that it didn’t wake his brother from his nap in the same room. The brothers’ triplet sister was in another room. When the babysitter went into the bedroom, she found Charlie unresponsive underneath the dresser. He didn’t survive.

In addition to the family’s initial

grief and shock, Horn was stunned to discover later that the dresser at fault was the shorter one, not the taller, bigger one in the bedroom.

“The fact that that dresser could fall over on one of my kids never even crossed my mind,” said Horn, who on the day of the incident asked his brother-in-law to remove the deadly piece of furniture. “When I got home that evening, I thought they took the wrong dresser. I still had assumed, like a lot of parents would assume, that it was a large dresser that had tipped over with a huge impact and killed Charlie. But it wasn’t. It was a dresser that was only 30 inches high—three drawers high and two drawers wide.”

Horn and other parents who have endured similar tip-over tragedies formed a group in 2018 that champions stronger furniture stability standards, called Parents Against Tip-Overs.

## Hidden in Plain Sight

Tip-overs are insidious because the danger is all around us inside our homes—that is, unless people use special kits to anchor furniture to walls. But some parents whose children were killed in a tip-over incident have told CR they didn’t know about the need for furniture anchors or straps until after the incident.

According to CR’s 2018 nationally representative survey of 1,502 U.S. adults, only about a quarter of Americans reported anchoring furniture at home. Of those who reported not anchoring, 7 percent said they had never heard of the safety measure. And 41 percent of that group reported they hadn’t used anchors because they thought their furniture was stable.

Though a dresser might appear to be stable, its center of gravity can quickly shift when someone pulls open a drawer, Dickerson says. Add weight to that drawer—when, for example, a young child tugs on a handle or hangs on an open drawer—and a seemingly stable dresser might topple forward.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BRETT HORN

# How Stable Is Your Dresser?

Consumer Reports conducted progressively tougher tip-over tests on 17 dresser models marketed as measuring 30 inches tall and under that represent a cross-section of the retail market. Twelve were purchased and tested between June 2018 and October 2018. The other five were evaluated in prior rounds of CR testing.

**PASSED**  
Tests 1, 2 & 3

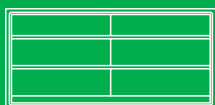
**PASSED**  
Tests 1 & 2

**PASSED**  
Test 1 only

**Test 1** All drawers open.

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

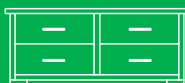
**Test 3** Top drawer open and the 50-pound weight is increased in 1-pound increments to a maximum of 60 pounds.



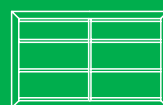
**Bellanest Aversa Bedroom 6-Drawer Dresser\*** \$550  
H30.19"xW64"xD18.94"  
157 lb. (Anchor included.)



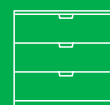
**Lexington Kitano 3-Drawer Nightstand** \$1,500  
H29.25"xW36.25"xD20"  
169.6 lb. (Anchor included.)



**Epoch Design Nara Bamboo Lowboy 4-Drawer Dresser** \$900  
H24"xW54.13"xD20.88"  
120.8 lb.



**Restoration Hardware Callum 6-Drawer Dresser\*** \$1,300  
H30.38"xW45"xD20"  
115.2 lb. (Anchor included.)



**Ikea NORDLI** \$150  
H30"xW31.5"xD18.5"  
92 lb. (Anchor included.)



**Sauder Barrister Lane 3-Drawer Chest** \$230  
H29.5"xW36.56"xD16.81"  
86.4 lb.



**Hooker Furniture Corsica Bachelors 3-Drawer Chest\*** \$1,190  
H30.38"xW42.13"xD19"  
107.6 lb. (Anchor included.)



**South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser B** \$160  
H27.38"xW51.19"xD18.88"  
108.6 lb. (Anchor included.)



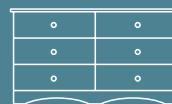
**Ameriwood Home Mixed Material 3-Drawer Dresser** \$100  
H29.88"xW31.25"xD16.69"  
68.8 lb. (Anchor included.)



**Homestar Central Park 3-Drawer Chest** \$90  
H30"xW27.56"xD16.5"  
49.2 lb. (Anchor included.)



**Prepac Bella 6-Drawer Dresser** \$185  
H28.50"xW47.44"xD16.25"  
82.4 lb. (Anchor included.)



**Nexera Montreal Kids 6-Drawer Double Dresser, Maple** \$268  
H28.63"xW48.25"xD17.75"  
87.6 lb.



**South Shore Libra 3-Drawer Chest** (similar to Simply Basics 3-Drawer Dresser) \$75  
H27.5"xW31.38"xD16"  
57.2 lb.



**Corrigan Studio Drumnacole 6-Drawer Double Dresser** \$710  
H29.75"xW47.25"xD17.75"  
103.8 lb. (Anchor included.)



**Pottery Barn Kids Belden End of Bed 2-Drawer Dresser** \$500  
H22.88"xW40.75"xD16.44"  
70.4 lb.

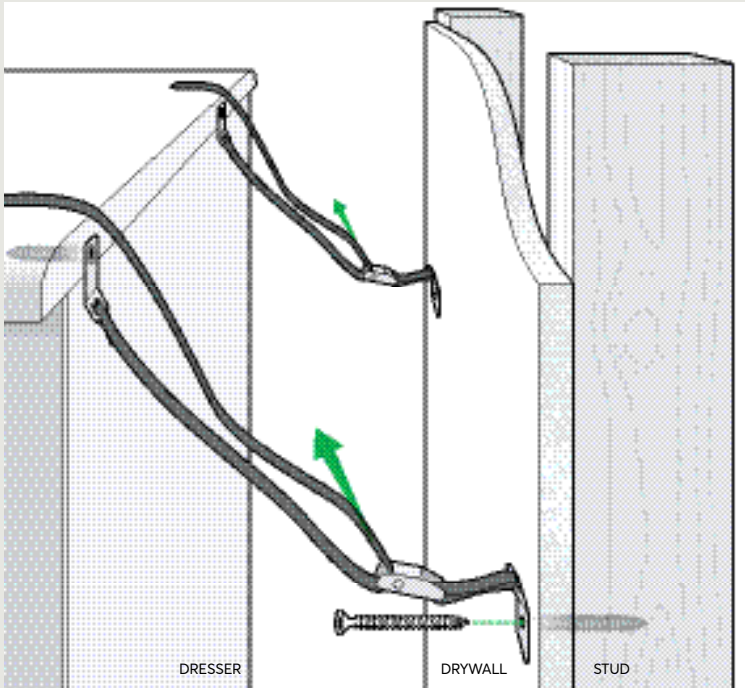


**South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser A** \$200  
H29.63"xW47.5"xD17.5"  
103.6 lb.



**Essential Home Belmont 4-Drawer Dresser Chest** (Ameriwood) \$60  
H29.88"xW27.75"xD15.75"  
47.0 lb. (Anchor included.)

\*These models were marketed as measuring 30 inches or less. When we got them into our labs and measured them, they were slightly above 30 inches. CR conducts its tests for the purpose of comparison and not for compliance. Our results are not meant as indicators of whether or not a dresser meets the voluntary industry standard set by ASTM International, a consensus standards-setting organization.



#### WATCH

Watch a CR expert demonstrate how to anchor a dresser to a wall, at [CR.org/anchor0319](https://www.consumerreports.org/anchor0319).

of an electrical outlet or light switch.) Once you find a stud running behind the dresser, mark it on the wall, then make an intersecting mark where the top of the dresser meets it. Next, pull the dresser away from the wall and measure down from the intersection; the distance depends on what's specified in the kit's instructions. This is where you'll install the wall bracket.

We recommend drilling a pilot hole and using a wood screw that's about 2 inches long to ensure a secure connection. If your kit comes with shorter screws, buy longer ones. If you live in a newer building with metal studs, you'll need different screws: Use 1½-inch fine thread drywall screws instead of wood screws.

Never use a drywall anchor or toggle to anchor furniture. "It's not like hanging a picture or mirror, where the force pulls straight down," Kerin says. "A furniture anchor needs to withstand any effort to pull the fixture straight out from the wall."

#### PLASTER

Studs in plaster walls are harder to find, and a traditional stud finder won't always work. You might have luck using a magnetic stud finder to detect the nails securing the wood lath to the studs.

When you think you've located a stud, follow it straight down to the baseboard and drill into the wall just above it with a small wood bit. If you feel steady resistance, you've hit a stud; if your drill plunges forward, move to the left or right, 1 inch at a time, until you find a stud. (You can patch the holes you leave behind with spackling or caulk.)

Measure up along the stud where you'll anchor your furniture, and use a properly sized wood bit to drill a pilot hole. Screw the bracket to the wall.

#### MASONRY

Brick or concrete block walls are far less common than drywall or plaster walls, and they pose a unique challenge. Unless you're skilled and tool-savvy, Kerin advises hiring a handyman or professional childproofer to secure furniture to masonry.

If you want to attempt the job yourself, you'll need a hammer drill with a suitably sized masonry bit and self-anchoring masonry screws.

#### BRACKETS

To attach the furniture bracket, ideally you want to drill into solid wood, as high as possible on the back of the piece. (It doesn't have to be centered.) Don't attach the bracket to the thin back panel, because that won't be as secure.

Mark the furniture and drill a pilot hole. Using the included wood screws, attach the bracket. Connect the wall-mounted bracket and furniture-mounted bracket with the included strap or cable, then tighten it until there's no slack. —Paul Hope

## How to Anchor Furniture

SHORT OF STRONGER and mandatory stability standards for dressers, the best way to prevent tip-overs is to anchor furniture to a wall. But as CR has uncovered during our ongoing investigation, that isn't an easy or well-known fix.

Some dressers come with furniture anchors, but not all. The industry's voluntary safety standard states that only dressers taller than 30 inches are required to include them. Shorter dressers—or others that don't comply with the standard—might not come with the hardware.

And if you buy or borrow a used dresser, you'll probably need to purchase furniture anchors separately. This is particularly relevant given that CR's 2018 nationally representative survey of 1,502 adults in the U.S. revealed that only 35 percent of Americans with young children at home bought a new dresser for their room.

New or used, here's how to anchor furniture to drywall, plaster, or masonry.

#### ANCHORS

Furniture anchoring kits, also known as anti-tip restraints and furniture straps, typically come with two brackets tethered by a strap or cable. One bracket screws directly to the piece of furniture; the other fastens to a wall. The connecting strap or cable is then tightened to keep the furniture from tipping.

Peter Kerin, founder of Foresight Childproofing in

Minneapolis, recommends kits with a braided steel cable or strap made of nylon webbing. If the furniture comes with hardware but the tethers aren't made of nylon webbing or steel cable, Kerin recommends purchasing your own kit. That said, don't put off anchoring furniture. If you can pick up a kit the same day you buy your furniture, great; if you can't, go with the

included anchoring kit, then upgrade later.

#### DRYWALL

Most homes built after the 1960s have interior walls made of drywall over wood studs. Start by placing the piece of furniture against the wall where you want it, and use a stud finder to locate a stud in the wall just above it. (You're almost certain to find one to the left or right

In many cases, dresser tip-overs happen when children are alone in their rooms, having just woken from a nap or a night's sleep. "A lot of these injuries happen to children who are no longer in a crib," says Peter Kerin, founder of Foresight Childproofing, a Minneapolis-based company that creates child-safe environments. "They're put to bed and hugged and kissed good night, and if they get up in the middle of the night, the parents aren't necessarily going to know."

It's typical for a toddler or preschooler to "decide they want something on top of the dresser," Kerin says. "They pull open a drawer or two and climb up on it. And unfortunately, some dressers tip even without a child climbing on them."

Some safety advocates say that even if manufacturers do meet the current voluntary standard, it's not sufficient to protect against tip-overs because the testing isn't rigorous or creative enough.

"Stronger standards that hold up under real-world scenarios are what's needed," says Nancy Cowles, executive director of Kids in Danger, a nonprofit child safety organization.

## A Need for Better Guidelines

When the voluntary standard for clothing storage units was established in 2000, it related to dressers that were thought to be most likely to tip over, which were identified as pieces taller than 30 inches, according to the American Home Furnishings Alliance, a trade group.

But a dresser's stability doesn't rely on any one characteristic. A host of factors contribute, including its overall weight and depth, whether it has a back weight, and how far the drawers extend. Because furniture designs and styles have evolved in the nearly two decades since the standard was created, many groups, including CR's advocacy division, say that the voluntary standard isn't robust or broad enough to protect consumers.

"We're urging the CPSC to set a

# 73%

Percentage of Americans who don't have anchored furniture in their home.

strong mandatory standard so that consumers can trust that dressers for sale will resist tipping over onto young children," says William Wallace, a senior policy analyst for CR. "This would allow regulators to enforce the rules and more easily gain industry cooperation for recalls. In the meantime, the furniture industry should act now to cover shorter dressers under its voluntary standard."

## A Spotlight on Industry

CR contacted the companies with dressers that failed our 50-pound test. The ones that responded said their products met the voluntary standard, which didn't apply to shorter dressers.

Some companies took action because of CR's test results. For instance, when CR informed Wayfair that the Drumnacole dresser it was selling failed our 50-pound stability test, the company said it immediately stopped selling it and contacted the supplier of the product to look into strengthening its safety guidelines.

Regulatory agencies, testing laboratories, and other industry leaders also have responded to CR's findings.

On Nov. 7, 2018, a furniture safety subcommittee convened by ASTM International (an organization that develops standards) reviewed CR's analysis and heard from parents whose children had died after a dresser tipped over onto them.

The subcommittee, which includes representatives from the furniture industry, government regulators, and consumer advocates (including CR), now says it is considering revising the scope of the voluntary stability standard so that it covers clothing storage units as low as 27 inches, which represents the lowest height of a product involved in a reported tip-over death (with an additional margin of safety).

At press time, a subcommittee vote on the proposed changes was expected through a ballot in January.

Separately, the CPSC has considered whether there should be a mandatory stability standard for clothing storage units, including dressers. The agency is conducting additional testing on those units to gather more data on how they perform, but it doesn't plan to issue any new rules in its current fiscal year, which ends in September 2019.

In the meantime, some companies are already conducting more comprehensive testing.

Laura Wood, a representative for Lexington Home Brands, says her company tests dressers for stability regardless of height. "Fundamentally, we believe that an item should be inherently stable," she told CR. "If it is not, it is not serving its intended purpose."



LEARN

The first installment of our furniture tip-over investigation ran in the May 2018 issue. To read it online, go to [CR.org/tipover](https://www.consumerreports.org/tipover).