

South Shore Recalls Dresser Linked to Child's Death

The Libra 3-drawer dresser failed CR's safety tests and the government knew of the fatality for more than a year

By Rachel Rabkin Peachman
May 09, 2019



South Shore on Thursday recalled 322,530 of its Libra 3-drawer dressers, citing the death of a two-year-old child who was killed when the product tipped over.

The alert—issued jointly by the company, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and Health Canada—says the dressers are unstable if “not anchored to the wall, posing serious tip-over and entrapment hazards that can result in death or injuries to children.” About 310,000 of the dressers were sold in the U.S., 6,930 in Canada, and 5,600 in Mexico.

The recall includes Libra 3-drawer dressers measuring 27½ inches high x 31¼ inches wide x 15½ inches deep and weighing about 52 to 56 lbs. (See a [complete list of recalled products](#).) The product was sold online by retailers including Walmart and Amazon, and was sold by Target as the Simply Basics 3 Drawer Dresser.

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The dresser had failed [Consumer Reports' tip-over tests](#), which we reported on in November, 2018. When informed of those results at the time, South Shore said that the dresser was not subject to the voluntary stability standard because it only applied to dressers greater than 30 inches in height.

The recall comes just one day before a furniture safety meeting at ASTM International, a group whose members set voluntary standards for many products. That meeting could lead to stronger measures for products such as the Libra 3-drawer dresser, by applying the existing standard to dressers as short as 27 inches. CR, which is a member of ASTM, has called for this move since our tests confirmed that shorter dressers could pose a tip-over risk.

The recall also comes shortly after the CPSC inadvertently released data to CR identifying injuries and deaths linked to various consumer products, including this dresser.

The [CPSC announcement](#) cites two furniture tip-over incidents tied to the Libra 3-drawer chest, including one injury and one death.

CR has identified the fatality as a 2-year-old girl in Buffalo, N.Y., who was killed on August 15, 2017 when the dresser fell on her. The toddler's parents had walked out of the child's bedroom for a “very short duration” when “they heard a sound of something fall,” according to an incident report CR received from the CPSC. They found their daughter underneath the dresser, unresponsive, the report says, noting that the girl died of “asphyxiation,” or an inability to breathe.

The CPSC data shows that the agency knew of the death by at least April 2018. South Shore told CR it was not informed of that incident until about four months later, in July of that year. And the company did not issue a recall for another nine months.

A South Shore spokesperson told CR that after the company was informed of the fatality, it and the CPSC “have been working closely” and that the decision to recall the product was based on the company’s “concern for the safety and wellbeing of our consumers.”

A spokesperson for the CPSC said the timing of the recall was not related to the data that was inadvertently released to CR or to the upcoming ASTM meeting. But he noted that the agency’s acting chairman, Ann Marie Buerkle, supports strengthening the standards for dressers as short as 27 inches. He also pointed to previous comments from Buerkle stating that “data show that tip-overs of such shorter units can cause significant injuries to young children and even death. Expanding the scope of the standard to include these units will help prevent these tragic events.”

This is the first dresser recall announced by the CPSC since the fall of 2017, despite numerous dressers on the market that don’t stay upright when put through basic testing.

A Tip-Over Averted

A South Shore spokesperson also confirmed to CR that the company knows of a third incident involving its Libra 3-drawer dresser.

CR believes that the incident involved the daughter of Todd Farnsworth, of East Syracuse, N.Y. He told CR that he informed the CPSC that a South Shore Libra 3-drawer dresser, along with a TV on top of it, tipped over in December 2017 when his then 2-year-old daughter, Elissia, reached into a middle drawer to pick out some clothes. Farnsworth, who said he was sitting a few feet away at the time, explained that he “jumped over the top of her and let everything fall on me. The dresser hit me and the TV bounced off my back and skimmed her head.”

After the incident, Farnsworth looked for a device to secure his furniture to the wall. “All I could find was wires and straps and they were very hard to install,” he said. So Farnsworth, a mechanic who also spent years serving as a volunteer firefighter and emergency medical technician, designed an anti-tip restraint of his own, called StickySafe.

Despite his background as a first responder and father of three, Farnsworth said had never heard about the dangers of furniture tip-overs or the need to anchor furniture until his own near-tragedy.

He’s hardly alone: Nearly three quarters of Americans say they have never anchored furniture, according to a [2018 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey](#) of 1,502 U.S. adults.



Todd Farnsworth saved his daughter, Elissia, from harm when a South Shore Libra 3-drawer dresser tipped over and nearly fell on her.
PHOTO: IRON DESIGN

Advocates Push for Safer Dressers

Farnsworth has since joined [Parents Against Tip-Over](#)s, a nationwide coalition of parents of children who lost their lives from a furniture tip-over.

“Parents Against Tip-Over is deeply saddened to hear of yet another furniture tip-over death caused by an unstable dresser,” said Janet McGee of PAT, [whose 22-month-old son Ted died in 2016](#) after an IKEA dresser fell on top of him.

“Unfortunately, product recalls are not enough. To prevent injuries and deaths, manufacturers must do more to design and manufacture tip-resistant dressers.”

McGee said the current recall illustrates another problem as well, involving a law—called Section 6(b) of the Consumer Product Safety Act—that requires the CPSC to, in most cases, get approval from companies before publicly announcing risks associated with their products. “For decades, 6(b) has allowed manufacturers to keep consumers in the dark on deadly products, which inhibits the CPSC from protecting consumers from preventable injuries and deaths, the primary reason the agency even exists,” she said.

William Wallace, manager of home and products policy for CR, said the chain of events reveals how long it can take the CPSC to go public about dangerous products and get companies to take action to prevent tragedies. “A child died when this dresser tipped over in August 2017. CR test results published seven months later found it couldn’t remain upright with a 50-pound load. And nearly 21 months after the fatal incident, the dresser is finally being recalled,” he said. “Companies and the CPSC need to alert consumers to hazards and get unsafe products off the market far faster than this.”

What Parents Should Do

CR recommends that consumers who own a Libra 3-drawer dresser should immediately stop using the product and then contact South Shore for a full refund. Parents should put the dresser in an area that children cannot access, and wait until the company picks it up free of charge or sends packaging along with a prepaid shipping label to mail drawer slides to the company.

For full options in the U.S. see the [CPSC recall announcement](#). For Canada, see the [Health Canada recall announcement](#).

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PRESS RELEASE

Consumer Reports: Dresser Recall Crucial but People Left at Risk, in the Dark Far Too Long

May 9, 2019

CR's investigation previously found South Shore dresser, tied to death of child, was likelier to tip

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission today **announced** (<https://cpsc.gov/Recalls/2019/South-Shore-Furniture-Recalls-Chest-of-Drawers-Due-to-Serious-Tip-Over-and-Entrapment-Hazards-One-Fatality-Reported>) the recall of more than 300,000 dressers because they can too easily tip over onto children, potentially placing them at risk of injury or death.

The South Shore Libra 3-Drawer Chest of Drawers—sold online by retailers including Walmart and Amazon, and marketed as the Simply Basics 3 Drawer Dresser by Target—is linked to the death of a two-year-old child, and it failed **Consumer Reports' 2018 testing** (<https://www.consumerreports.org/furniture/furniture-tip-overs-hidden-hazard-in-your-home/>) of the model.

"A child died when this dresser tipped over in August 2017. CR test results published seven months later found it couldn't remain upright with a 50-pound load. And nearly 21 months after the fatal incident, the dresser is finally being recalled," said William Wallace, Manager of Home and Products Policy for Consumer Reports.

CR conducted stability testing of this recalled South Shore model as a part of its ongoing **investigation** (<https://www.consumerreports.org/furniture/furniture-dressers-exempt-from-industry-safety-standard-fail-consumer-reports-tests/>) into the risks of dresser tip-over incidents to children. The dressers tested represented a cross-section of the market, and they were subjected to progressively more stringent stability tests, designed to simulate the weight of young children on them. The South Shore dresser model was not stable enough to stay upright with 50 pounds of weight hanging from an open drawer in CR's tests.

"This recall is crucial but long overdue. Anybody who owns one should immediately get South Shore to pick up the dresser for free and provide a full refund. It's also clear that companies and the CPSC need to alert consumers to hazards and get unsafe products off the market far faster than this," Wallace added.

CR has **called** (https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/press_release/furniture-manufacturers-government-must-act-now-to-stop-tip-overs-recall-dangerous-dressers/) for strong action by furniture manufacturers and the federal government to carry out recalls to protect children from dresser tip-over incidents in the home, which can lead to serious injury or even death. CR has long advocated for a stronger, mandatory standard for furniture in order to help avoid tip-over injuries and deaths. CR, other safety advocates, and the parents of children killed by dressers that tipped over also have urged the furniture industry to substantially strengthen its voluntary standard in **several key ways** (<https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/research/joint-letter-urging-furniture-makers-to-strengthen-dresser-safety-standard-to-reduce-tip-over-injuries-and-deaths/>).

CR urges consumers to secure dressers to walls to help prevent tip-overs—including through our advice in an **article and video** (<https://www.consumerreports.org/furniture/how-to-anchor-furniture-to-help-prevent-tip-overs/>) that helps consumers know how to anchor furniture—but recognizes that it is **not always an option** (<https://www.consumerreports.org/furniture/furniture-anchors-not-an-easy-fix-as-child-tip-over-deaths-persist/>) for people who rent or those who are not handy with tools. CR says that the furniture industry has a responsibility to build safer, more stable dressers, and that safety should not rely on a person's skill at anchoring a dresser to a wall.

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