

ARCHIVE

Too often, home is where the harm is



By **ROGER CLENDENING II**

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Furniture can kill, and so can lots of other things in the home.

Four-year-old Brett Puniska of New Port Richey became the latest victim when a 400-pound entertainment center fell on him Wednesday afternoon. In March, 18-month-old Jonathan Wheeler of Land O'Lakes was killed when he pulled a dresser onto himself.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that 60 deaths in the nation were attributed to tipped-over furniture between January 1985 and July 1995, and 80 percent of those victims were under the age of 5. Bookshelves, dressers and television stands seem to be the biggest culprits.

"The commission does not believe that it is an increasing problem," representative Nikki White said Thursday from the group's headquarters in Bethesda, Md. "We believe people are actually more aware of the problem now."

The National Safety Council reports that in 1994, 26,700 Americans were killed and 7-million received disabling injuries from accidents in the home.

"It's home," said Michael Taylor, council spokesman, explaining why people sometimes forget the safety rules that they might remember elsewhere. "It's where you become complacent."

In March 1990, the safety commission issued an alert to what it called a "hidden hazard in the home." It advised the simplest ways to secure furniture, with angle braces and wall supports, to avoid dangerous accidents.

"The commission's message is to anchor heavy furniture like that to the wall . . . as well as keeping children away from that type of furniture as much as possible so

Tampa Bay Times

"The biggest safety precaution . . . would be supervision, of course," Taylor added. "And I'm sure most parents are aware of that."

The National Safety Council, an Illinois-based non-profit group, offers a list of ways to decrease the risk of accident in any home. (See chart, 1B)

To report an unsafe product or to receive product safety information, call the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission hot line, toll free, at (800) 638-2772. Spanish-speaking help is available. A teletypewriter for the hearing-impaired is available at (800) 638-8270.

Making a home safe for kids

Your home is where you expect your child to feel safest. But the home is where 7-million Americans suffered disabling injuries in 1994 with an additional 26,700 injuries resulting in death. Below is a checklist of safety items every home should have.

Angle braces _ To prevent large pieces of furniture from tipping over, angle bracers attached to the top of the furniture secures it to the wall.

Smoke detectors _ A smoke detector should be on every floor of the home.

Carbon monoxide detectors _ A detector can give early warning of this odorless, colorless and tasteless killer.

Fire extinguishers _ A multipurpose dry chemical, Class ABC extinguisher is the best choice.

Safety glazing _ Shower doors, patio doors or any other large glass panel in the home should be made with safety glazing materials (safety glass).

First aid kit _ Every home should have a well-stocked first aid kit.

Slip-resistant finishes _ Use a non-slip mat or install strips or decals in tubs and showers to help prevent slipping.

Grab bars and handrails _ Bathtubs and showers should have grab bars firmly anchored into the wall. And every set of stairs should have handrails.

Lighting _ Use night lights near bathrooms, bedrooms and stairwells.

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