Konsumentverket/KO

PM 2005:2

Cots

Market surveillance inspection of cots, 2003

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PM 2005:2
ISBN 91-7398-882-0
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Introduction

The National Consumer Agency conducted a market surveillance inspection of cots in 2003, as part of the Agency's pro-active surveillance activities in accordance with the Product Safety Directive.

An earlier market surveillance inspection of cots was carried out in the middle of the 1990s.

Summary

The 2003 inspection examined 13 cots. Only two of them completely met all the requirements in the applicable standards for cots.

Six cots were of such flimsy construction that they fell apart, and testing had to be stopped.

Eight cots had one or more faults that could result in suffocation or strangling. Examples of such faults are:
- too great a distance between the bars in the cot sides,
- corner posts that stick up above the line of the top rail, and which could catch something around a child's throat or an item of clothing, or
- dangerous openings or gaps that can arise as a result of the cot's flimsy construction.

Eight cots had unsatisfactory assembly instructions; either totally lacking, or being unclear, incomplete or in some language other than Swedish. Incorrect assembly of a cot increases the risk of injuries: if, for example, the base is assembled too high, there is a greater risk of head injuries if the child falls out of the cot.

The latching mechanism of the drop-down side of two of the cots was so simple that it was felt that a child could easily open it, which created a risk of the child falling out. In addition, it gave parents a false sense of security, believing that their child was in a safe place, when this was perhaps not the case at all. One cot had long sides that could be lifted off: they were regarded as being so easy to lift off that even a child would be able to do so.

Requirements applicable to cots

To prevent small children from injuring themselves in their cots, the National Consumer Agency has agreed a set of safety requirements with the manufacturers and retailers, as set out in the Agency's 'Guidelines for Safety Requirements for Cots'. According to these guidelines, cots on the Swedish market must comply with the safety requirements in Swedish Standard no. SS-EN 716 - Furniture -

Cots for Domestic Use, or with other safety requirements that guarantee a corresponding safety level.
If a cot on the market is found to have safety shortcomings, e.g. by not fulfilling the requirements in the standard for cots, the trader responsible is required by the Product Safety Act to take various safety correction measures. He can, for example, be forbidden by the Market Court under threat of penalty to continue with sale of the cot. He can also be required to recall any cots that have already been sold, either from retailers or from the end purchasers. Recalling products from consumers often means that the manufacturer or agent has to place advertisements in newspapers in order to reach out to consumers. A third measure that can be required under the Product Safety Act is the provision of safety information, which means that the manufacturer/agent is required to apply warning information on the product, or to provide safety information in some other way. However, few cases get as far as the Market Court: normally, most manufacturers/agents voluntarily undertake the necessary steps after discussions with the Agency.

Background

The National Consumer Agency planned, in the spring of 2003, to carry out a market surveillance inspection of cots. We had got the impression that there was considerable confusion and a lack of awareness among manufacturers and importers concerning the requirements applicable for the Swedish market.

Cots are a product that must meet particularly high standards of safety, as children are often left in them out of an adult's sight. Deaths have occurred as a result of unsuitable design of cots. There are examples of cases where a child has managed to wriggle itself, feet-first, through an opening and then become wedged at the chest or head and suffocated. Other deaths have occurred because the child's clothes or something round its neck have got caught on a corner post, and the child has then sat backwards or fallen over. It is cases such as these that lie behind the various requirements in the safety standard for cots.

Injury statistics

EHLASS estimates that about 100 accidents involving cots occur each year, most of them in connection with the child trying to climb out of the cot.

EHLASS is the acronym for European Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System. Most EU countries record data for it. In Sweden, data for the system is supplied by the A&E units and out-of-hours heath centres in Umeå, Hälsingland and Skaraborg, the catchment areas for which contain about 6 % of Sweden's population. The results of the statistics that they generate can be extrapolated to give national estimates. Overall, EHLASS in Sweden is operated by the Epidemiology Centre of the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Consumer Agency.

Carrying out the market surveillance inspection

While we were planning the market surveillance inspection operation, it came to our notice that a 'child and parent' magazine was testing 13 cots at SP Swedish National Testing and Research Institute in Borås. The tests were being carried out against Swedish Standard SS-EN 716, which is a direct implementation of European Standard EN 716. SP is accredited for testing against this standard. We therefore decided to await the results of these tests: it was not felt to be reasonable to perform a similar set of tests immediately after those arranged by the magazine, with the same selection of cots and to the same standard.

The inspection covered cots from the following suppliers / retailers:
Bjärnums möbelfabrik [*Bjärnum's Furniture Factory*] / Barnsängsfabriken [*The Cot Factory*]
Brio/ENG
IKEA
Kaxholmens sängfabrik [*Kaxholmens Bed Factory*]
Noa snickerier [*Noa Joinery*]
Jysk bäddlager [*Jutland Bed Store*]
Segr
Babyproffsen.

Results / Risk assessment

Only two of the thirteen cots complied with all the safety requirements in the standard. See also the SP test report (Appendix x).

The test results show that the following risks / defects were found with/in the cots:

Assembly instructions

Two cots, Frida and Linnéa, had no assembly instructions.
Six cots, Gustav, Kajsa, Syrran, Victoria, Monica and Basic had assembly instructions that were unclear, incomplete and/or in some language other than Swedish. As a result, the cot could be incorrectly assembled: the bottom, for example, might be too high, with the result there is a greater risk of the child falling out of the cot, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries or other injuries. As assembled by SP, the bases of the Frida and Kajsa cots were too high in their uppermost positions. The side of the Gustav cot, on the other hand, was too low. The Victoria and Simon cots had no indication of the maximum mattress thickness. If the cot has a thicker mattress than intended, there is also a greater risk of the child falling out of the cot.

Latching mechanisms

The latching mechanisms for the drop-down sides on two cots, Linnéa and Victoria, were so simple that it was felt that a child could easily release them, thus increasing the risk of falling out of the cot. In addition, it gave parents a false sense

of security, believing that their child was in a safe place, when this was perhaps not the case at all. This false sense of security was also evident in the case of the Linnéa cot, the long sides of which could be lifted off. They were regarded as being so easy to lift off that even a child could do so. With one of its sides removed, the product no longer meets the definition of a cot, and does not provide the protection for the child that it is intended to provide.

Flimsy construction

Six cots, Linnéa, Kajsa, Gustav, Syrran, Victoria and Simon, had such flimsy construction that they fell to pieces during testing, so that testing had to be stopped. If the side bars break or come loose so that dangerous gaps are created, a child could get trapped if the cot was nevertheless used, again with the risk of strangling or suffocation. Alternatively, if gaps are too large, a child can either wriggle through feet-first, and become trapped by the chest and be suffocated, or can get his or her head through, become caught and be strangled.

Raised corner posts

Three cots, Linnéa, Kajsa and Gustav, had corner posts that continued up above the level of the headboard / side rails, which presents a risk of the child's clothes becoming caught, e.g. braces or something around the neck, which could strangle the child if he/she sits down while the clothing is caught.

Too great a distance between the bars in the sides of the cot

Three cots, Linnéa, Basic and Simon, had too great a distance between the vertical bars in the cot sides, which creates a risk of suffocation if the child wriggles feet-first between the bars and then keeps going until he or she is wedged at the chest.

Too great a distance between the slats in the base

Seven cots, Frida, Linnéa, Gustav, Syrran, Victoria, Monica and Basic, had too great a distance between the slats in the base, which could mean that if the child gets underneath the mattress – as some children manage to do – he or she could get trapped with a leg or arm between the slats.

Too large holes in the headboard

One cot, Gustav, had too large holes drilled in the headboard, presenting a risk of getting a finger caught.

Sharp edges

Four cots, Syrran, Basic, Simon and Trogen, had sharp edges on which a child could hurt him/herself.

Removable bars rather too easy to remove

One cot, Be Safe Opal, had removable bars in the drop sides so that a somewhat older child could get into and out of the cot by him/herself. This is fine in terms of

preventing accidental falls, but these bars were so easy to remove that it would be possible for a child in the cot to do it. If he/she removes only one bar, the resulting opening is a danger: the child could become trapped and suffocated or strangled if he/she gets part-way through the opening and then becomes wedged at the chest or head.

Eight cots were regarded as being potential death-traps due to the risk of strangling or suffocation:

Linnéa, Kajsa, Gustav, Syrran, Victoria, Basic, Simon and Be Safe Opal.

Eight cots were regarded as presenting a risk of head injuries resulting from increased risk of falls:

Frida, Linnéa, Kajsa, Gustav, Syrran, Victoria, Monica and Basic.

Seven cots were regarded as presenting a risk of a child getting an arm or leg trapped:

Frida, Linnéa, Gustav, Syrran, Victoria, Monica and Basic.

Four cots were regarded as presenting a risk of cuts if a child comes into contact with sharp edges:

Syrran, Basic, Simon and Trogen.

One cot was regarded as presenting a risk of a child getting his/her fingers caught:

Gustav.

Summary of risks for each of the cots:

Basic

Inadequate assembly instructions, with important information missing. As a result, the cot could be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out of the cot, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.

The distance between the slats in the base is too wide. A child could get trapped by the arms or legs if he/she gets underneath the mattress - which a number of children manage to do.

The cot has sharp edges, on which a child could hurt him/herself.
The bars in the sides were too far apart, which means that a child could be suffocated if he/she wriggles feet-first between two bars and then becomes wedged at the chest. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous openings have previously occurred in Sweden.

Be Safe Opal

The removable bars in one of the side panels are intended to make the cot safer in respect of falls, but were regarded as being so easy to remove that a child in the cot could do it him/herself. If he/she removes only one bar (instead of two or three as is presumably intended), the resulting opening is dangerous. The child could become trapped and suffocated or strangled if he/she gets part-way through the opening, feet-first, and then becomes wedged at the chest or head. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.

Frida

No assembly instructions. As a result, the cot could be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.

The distance between the slats in the base is too wide. A child could get trapped by the arms or legs if he/she gets underneath the mattress - which a number of children manage to do.

Gustav

The slats in the base broke in the impact test, and the entire base collapsed. If slats or bars break or come loose and form dangerous gaps, the child can become trapped in them if the cot is still used, with resulting risk of strangling or suffocation. If the gap is sufficiently wide, the child can start to get through it feet-first, only to become trapped at the chest and suffocated or trapped by the head and strangled. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.

Poor assembly instructions. As a result, the cot could be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out of it, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.

The distance between the slats in the base is too wide. A child could get trapped by the arms or legs if he/she gets underneath the mattress - which a number of children manage to do.

Holes drilled in the headboard are too large: a child's finger could get trapped in them.

The corner posts project above the top of the headboard, which presents a risk of the child's clothes becoming caught, e.g. braces or something around the neck, which could strangle the child if he/she sits down while the clothing is caught. Fatal accidents caused by such projecting corner posts have previously occurred in Sweden.

Kajsa

The base failed the shock test. If parts of the cot break so that dangerous gaps are created, a child can become trapped in them if the cot is still used, with resulting risk of strangling or suffocation. If a gap is sufficiently wide, the child can start to get through it feet-first, only to become trapped at the chest and suffocated or trapped by the head and strangled. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.

Important information is missing from the assembly instructions. The cot could therefore be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out of it, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.

The corner posts project above the top of the headboard, which consequently creates a risk of the child's clothes becoming caught, e.g. braces or something around the neck, which could strangle the child if he/she sits down while the clothing is caught. Fatal accidents caused by such projecting corner posts have previously occurred in Sweden.

Linnéa

This cot collapsed during testing, which had to be stopped. If parts of a cot break so that dangerous gaps are created, a child can become trapped in them if the cot is still used, with resulting risk of strangling or suffocation. If a gap is sufficiently wide, the child can start to get through it feet-first, only to become trapped at the chest and suffocated or trapped by the head and strangled. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.

No assembly instructions. The cot could be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out of the cot, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.

The latching mechanism for the drop-down side did not work satisfactorily. If a child can easily open the latch, there is a greater risk of the child falling out of bed. In addition, it gives parents a false sense of security, believing that their child is in a safe place, when this is perhaps not the case at all.

It was very easy to remove the other long side, i.e. the 'fixed' side. If the child or a brother or sister can lift the side off, the parents are again given a false sense of security. With one of its sides removed, the product no longer meets the definition of a cot, and does not provide the protection for the child that it is intended to provide.

The distance between the slats in the base is too wide. A child could get trapped by the arms or legs if he/she gets underneath the mattress - which a number of children manage to do.

The corner posts project above the top of the headboard, which therefore creates a risk of the child's clothes becoming caught, e.g. braces or something around the neck, which could strangle the child if he/she sits down while the clothing is caught. Fatal accidents caused by such projecting corner posts have previously occurred in Sweden.

The bars in the sides are too far apart, which means that a child could be suffocated if he/she wriggles feet-first between two bars and then becomes wedged at the chest. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.

Monica

Assembly instructions not in Swedish. The cot could be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out of it, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.

The distance between the slats in the base is too wide. A child could get trapped by the arms or legs if he/she gets underneath the mattress - which a number of children manage to do.

Simon

The base collapsed in the impact test, and clamps came loose. If parts of a cot break so that dangerous gaps are created, a child can become trapped in them if the cot is still used, with resulting risk of strangling or suffocation. If a gap is sufficiently wide, the child can start to get through it feet-first, only to become trapped at the chest and suffocated or trapped by the head and strangled. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.
The cot has sharp edges, on which a child could hurt him/herself.

The bars in the sides are too far apart, which means that a child could be suffocated if he/she wriggles feet-first between two bars and then becomes wedged at the chest.

Syrran

The base collapsed in the shock test. If parts of a cot break so that dangerous gaps are created, a child can become trapped in them if the cot is still used, with resulting risk of strangling or suffocation. If a gap is sufficiently wide, the child can start to get through it feet-first, only to become trapped at the chest and suffocated or trapped by the head and strangled. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.

The assembly instructions are unclear, and not in Swedish. The cot could be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out of it, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.
The distance between the slats in the base is too wide. A child could get trapped by the arms or legs if he/she gets underneath the mattress - which a number of

children manage to do. The cot has sharp edges, on which a child could hurt him/herself.

Trogen

Has somewhat sharp edges.

Victoria

The base was damaged after only two test blows. It should withstand 1000 blows on each of seven points, i.e. a total of 7000 blows. If a cot breaks so that dangerous gaps are created, a child can become trapped in them if the cot is still used, with resulting risk of strangling or suffocation. If a gap is sufficiently wide, the child can start to get through it feet-first, only to become trapped at the chest and suffocated or trapped by the head and strangled. Fatal accidents caused by dangerous gaps have previously occurred in Sweden.

Inadequate assembly instructions, not in Swedish. The cot could therefore be incorrectly assembled, e.g. with the base too high, so that there is a greater risk of the child falling out of it, in turn increasing the risk of head injuries.

The latching mechanism for the drop-down side does not meet the requirements in the standard: a child could relatively easily release the latch. If he/she can do so, there is an increased risk of falling out of the cot. In addition, parents are given a false sense of security, believing that their child is in a safe place, when this is perhaps not the case at all.

The distance between the slats in the base is too wide. A child could get trapped by the arms or legs if he/she gets underneath the mattress - which a number of children manage to do.

Conclusion

Cots need to be marked in such a way that they can be identified. It can happen in these inspections that a manufacturer is not prepared to admit that a product is his, or says that he is not sure whether the item has been made by his company, or when it was made. SS-EN 716 requires cots to be identifiably marked. It is important that this requirement is complied with.

There is a need to increase awareness of the risks with cots, awareness of the standard and awareness of the importance of complying with it. More intensive contacts with trade organisations and companies could improve this situation.