

Stronger Action Needed to Protect Older Adults from Dangerous Adult Portable Bed Rails: Consumer Voice Continues to Call for Mandatory Rules

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (Consumer Voice) commends the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC or "Commission") for including adult portable bed rails in its new Senior Safety Initiative but urges the Commission to further protect older adults by issuing mandatory rules for these products.

Between January 2003 and December 2012, CPSC received reports of 174 deaths and 110,000 injuries associated with adult portable bed rails. Bed rails are frequently used in home or long-term care facilities because they are believed to keep people safe. In reality, bed rails can be extremely harmful. Older adults and persons with disabilities can be strangled or asphyxiated if they become trapped in the gap between the bed rail and the mattress or between the rails.

Since December 2012, Consumer Voice has called for minimum safety standards for adult portable bed rails. In 2013, Consumer Voice, family member and ardent advocate Gloria Black, the Consumer Federation of America and other organizations petitioned CPSC to initiate mandatory rule making. However, the Commission recently announced that it has deferred taking action. Instead, the Commission directed CPSC staff to continue to work on voluntary standards and to make a recommendation in twelve months about whether the Commission should grant the petition and initiate mandatory rule making.

The Consumer Voice is deeply concerned that CPSC has chosen to pursue volunteer standards. "It has been our experience that voluntary standards don't work," said Robyn Grant, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy. Grant noted that it can take months, if not years, to develop these standards and then assess their effectiveness. During this period of time, more older adults and persons with disabilities could be injured or killed. In fact, just one day after the release of the Senior Safety Initiative, the CPSC announced a recall of 113,000 bed handles manufactured by Bed Handles of Blue Springs, Missouri. These devices were linked to the deaths of three individuals. Bed handles are a type of adult portable bed rail. While praising the Commission's action, the first of its kind for adult portable bed rails, Grant said the recall underscores the dangers posed by these products. "We need action sooner, rather than later," she stated. "We can't keep gambling with people's lives."

The Consumer Voice calls on the Commission to reconsider its decision regarding the petition and create strong mandatory rules without delay.