

PREVENTING WINDOW FALLS

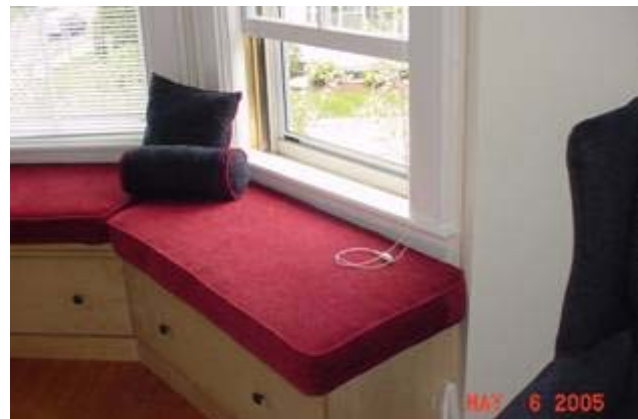
By
Bob Mulloy

As the warm weather arrives, I guarantee the media will report another gut-wrenching story about a toddler who has fallen from a window and suffered serious injury or death. Sadly, such tragedies seem to be an annual event, despite the best efforts of health officials to educate the public. According to the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC), “about 12 children 10 years old and younger die each year; and more than 4,000 are treated in hospital emergency rooms for window fall-related injuries.” Window falls can occur in any home or apartment, and are not limited to urban areas or lower economic areas. Regardless of the location, a window fall places tremendous stress and a lifetime guilt-trip on the conscience of parents & caretakers, because through hindsight they know that the accident was preventable. A catastrophe may have occurred, and the burden may be overwhelming for any caretaker.

Perhaps as home inspectors, we can prevent another window-fall tragedy by educating our clients about window safety. The ASHI® Standards of Practice state “that the inspector is not required to report on screening,” but the inspector is “required to examine a representative sample of windows.” I suggest that each inspector initiate a “field practice” of briefly explaining window-safety guidelines during a home inspection and within the final report.

We all know that it is impossible to supervise a toddler every second of every day, and that a home must be made “childproof.” For that reason, parents routinely install childproof locks on their cabinets, gates and staircases. Sadly, many parents don’t realize until it is too late that window safety was neglected. ASHI® inspectors have a unique opportunity to educate the public during the course of a home inspection regarding the prevention of window falls. As home inspectors, we are in the communication business, and educating the public about safety should be a routine part of each and every inspection.

A window is part of the building envelope that functions as a source of light, ventilation and emergency egress; unfortunately, a window is also an attractive nuisance to a toddler. Children are curious; they like to climb and they like to look out windows. Parents must understand that window screens are designed to keep bugs out, and not keep children in. Screens used in today’s windows are only secured by a thin rubber gasket and will easily break when subjected to the weight of a child. Even a fall from a first-story window can result in a trauma or fatality.



The purpose of window stops and the value of window guards should be explained to the public, as well as only opening the top of the window for ventilation. Teach your clients that window stops are not solely to prevent a burglary but to prevent the lower sash from being raised far enough

for a toddler to fall out. Explain that purchasing window guards should be considered as one more objective when “childproofing” the home, and that window guards should comply with CPSC guidelines and local fire department and building code requirements.

CPSC guidelines for preventing window falls are:

- Install window guards to prevent children from falling out of windows. (For windows on the 6th floor and below, install window guards that adults and older children can open easily in case of fire. For windows on the 7th floor and above, permanent window guards can be installed.)
- Guards should be installed in children's bedrooms, parents' bedroom, and other rooms where young children spend time.
- Install window stops that permit windows to open no more than 4 inches.
- Never depend on screens to keep children from falling out of windows.
- Whenever possible, open windows from the top - not the bottom.
- Keep furniture away from windows, to discourage children from climbing near windows.

For further information, contact your local or state Board of Health or visit the following web sites:

<http://www.cpsc.gov>

www.windowssafe.com

<http://www.windowcoverings.org/index.html>

<http://www.nsc.org/library/facts/kidfalls.htm>

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