



**Australian
Competition &
Consumer
Commission**

Suggested practice for drawstrings on children's clothing

Drawstrings on children's clothing may catch on items such as playground equipment, bus doors or cots and lead to death or injury.

Accidents related to drawstrings on children's upper body clothing, such as jumpers and wind cheaters, have been associated with a number of deaths in the United States, where 22 deaths and 48 non-fatal incidents involving the entanglement of children's clothing and drawstrings were reported between 1985 and 1999.

The ACCC is encouraged that to date, there have been no fatalities reported in Australia from accidents involving drawstrings. This may be due to Australian climatic and cultural differences but the early implementation of safety considerations by many manufacturers, importers & retailers in Australia may also be an important factor.

To ensure that drawstring hazards continue to be minimised, the ACCC is seeking cooperation from suppliers to follow a voluntary guideline when purchasing product for sale in Australia. This voluntary ACCC guideline, set out below, is based on voluntary US and European standards (ASTM F1816 and EN 14682). Since the US standard was introduced in 1997, the average numbers of fatalities and non-fatal incidents reported each year in the United States have decreased by 75% and 90% respectively.

The guidance provided by the ACCC in this document is suggested practice only and does not represent a standard or mandatory requirement.

Deaths and injuries

Hood/Neck Drawstrings

Over two thirds of the deaths and non-fatal incidents recorded in the US involved hood/neck drawstrings. The majority of these cases involved playground slides, but some cases involved fences and cots. Typically, as the child climbed or descended, a toggle or knot on the drawstring got caught in a small space or gap at an elevated part of the structure. Examples of catch points include a protruding bolt or a tiny space between a guardrail and the slide platform. The child was then suspended part way down the slide and the drawstring pulled the garment taut around the neck, strangling the child. Victims of these cases ranged in age from 2 to 8 years old.

Waist/Lower-Hem Drawstrings

Almost one-third of the deaths and non-fatal incidents recorded in the US involved drawstrings at the waist/lower-hem of children's jackets and windcheaters. Most of these involved children whose waist or lower-hem strings of their jackets caught on school bus handrails or in school bus doors. In most cases, the drawstring at the lower-hem of the jacket snagged in a small space in the hand rail as the child was getting off the bus.

Without the child or bus driver realising that the drawstring was caught on the handrail, the bus doors closed and the bus drove away, dragging the child. Deaths occurred when were run over by the bus. Victims of these school bus cases ranged in age from 7 to 14 years of age.

Children's clothing suggested practice

As a general guide, the ACCC suggests that manufacturers and retailers supplying children's clothing carefully assess the safety of all drawstrings, decorative cords, shoulder straps and functional cords protruding from the back of all children's clothing. The ACCC also suggests alternatives such as removable sashes and belts as safer options.

The ACCC recommends suppliers undertake a risk assessment using either:

- voluntary US standard *ASTM F 1816-97 Standard Safety Specification for Drawstrings on Children's Upper Outerwear*; or
- voluntary European standard *EN 14682:2007 Safety of Children's Clothing - Cords and Drawstrings on Children's Clothing – Specifications*; or
- the safety features below, which are taken from some parts of the above standards.

Hood and Neck

Young children from birth to 7 years - garments should not have drawstrings, functional cords or decorative cords. Decorative items such as bows should not have any free ends longer than **75 mm** or loops greater than **75 mm**.

Older children and young persons aged 7 to 14 years - garments including jackets and windcheaters should not have drawstrings with any free ends.

It is preferred that these garments use alternative closures such as, but not limited to, snaps, buttons or Velcro, rather than drawstrings. Functional and decorative cords should not measure more than **75 mm** in length at either end.

Waist/Lower-Hem

The end of any waist or lower-hem drawstrings should measure no more than **75 mm** from where the string extends out of the garment to its end, when the garment is expanded to its fullest width.

Garment safety suggestions

If garments are supplied with drawstrings the ACCC also suggests that:

- the drawstring be sewn to the garment at its midpoint so the string can not be pulled to one side and lengthened enough to catch on something
- toggles or knots at the ends of all drawstrings are eliminated where possible as these can create a 'hook' or stopper that gets caught in small spaces. Other alternatives are encouraged in these cases
- lower/ankle hem drawstrings should be finished on the inside of the garment.