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# Furniture Tip-Overs: A Hidden Hazard in Your Home

Some makers do it right, but children still die from unstable dressers. And there are no laws to help prevent future tragedies.

By Rachel Rabkin Peachman  
March 22, 2018

After church one Sunday afternoon in 2016, Janet McGee waited for her 22-month-old son, Ted, to wake from his afternoon nap. As family members busied themselves in their Apple Valley, Minn., home, McGee checked on Ted every 15 minutes or so. The last time she peeked in, Ted wasn't in bed, and she noticed that the dresser had toppled over.

In an instant, the horrible reality set in. "He's under there, he's under there," McGee remembers thinking. "I lifted the dresser up, and I started digging through the drawers because all of the drawers had fallen out. And there he was at the bottom. His face was purple. His eyes were half open. I screamed for my husband to come. I started CPR on him. My 11-year-old son called 911."

Paramedics rushed Ted to the hospital, but medical staff couldn't revive him. McGee remembers holding his hand at the hospital. "It was cold, and I knew."

MORE ON TIP-OVERS

**\$69 Ikea Dresser Passes CR's Toughest Furniture Tip-Over Test**

**Dressers Exempt From Industry Safety Standard Fail Consumer Reports' Tests**

**Furniture Anchors Not an Easy Fix, as Child Tip-Over Deaths Persist**

**How to Anchor Furniture to Help Prevent Tip-Overs**

The weight of the dresser had suffocated the little boy. And though family members were within earshot, no one heard a crash because Ted’s body absorbed the impact of the falling dresser. McGee and her husband, Jeremy, assumed their tragedy was a freakish occurrence. But they soon discovered that Ted was just one of many victims of what safety regulators categorize as a “furniture tip-over,” a sometimes fatal event affecting thousands of U.S. families each year. The McGees also learned that the dresser, an Ikea Malm, had been linked to previous tip-over deaths. Ikea did not decide to recall the product until four months after Ted died. (Read our May 2018 report with new test results that show that building affordable furniture to a stronger standard can be done.)

The tip-over problem is epidemic: Someone in the U.S. is injured every 17 minutes by a furniture, television, or appliance tip-over, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. After declining for a few years, estimated tip-over injuries for children younger than 6 involving dressers and other clothing storage units increased in 2016 to 2,800 from 2,100 the year before, or by 33 percent, according to the CPSC.

Dressers and other clothing storage units account for at least 11 percent of furniture tip-over injuries, according to the CPSC. But it’s the number of tip-over deaths in the category—there were 195 reported to the CPSC between 2000 and 2016—that particularly makes it a crisis.

## Podcast: Hear Moms Tell Their Stories



The vast majority of the victims are children younger than 6. Many times, they cause the tip-over by climbing on the front of a

dresser or by playing inside a drawer. Sometimes they're alone in their room, and a parent, like Janet McGee, finds them.

To protect Ted in his home, the McGees installed safety gates, covered power outlets, and latched all cabinets—but they had never heard of a furniture tip-over. “It was just this little, tiny window of time where your life changes forever,” McGee told Consumer Reports. “Instead of planning his second birthday party that was supposed to be Elmo-themed, we were planning his funeral.”

“I had no idea that they made anything to strap down furniture.”

—**KEISHA BOWLES, CONWAY, ARK.** Bowles' daughter, Sydney Chance, was killed after a dresser and the TV atop it fell on her in 2012. Sydney Chance was 2 years old.

## The Truth About Tip-Overs

As it stands today, the industry operates under a voluntary tip-over testing standard—which means any dresser taller than 30 inches should stay upright with 50 pounds of weight hanging from an open drawer. Because it's voluntary, manufacturers aren't required to conduct the testing, let alone meet the standard, to sell their dressers in the U.S. Some manufacturers meet the standard or go beyond it; others fall short.

In light of the continuing danger, Consumer Reports launched an investigation to assess the stability of dressers in the marketplace. Over the course of a year, CR analyzed thousands of incident reports obtained from the CPSC through a Freedom of Information Act request to better understand the circumstances of injuries and deaths. CR also tested 24 dressers, representing a cross-section of the market, to find which ones could pass several progressively more stringent tip-over tests. Two tests were modeled after the industry's current voluntary standard, but CR also devised a more rigorous test using up to 60 pounds of weight,

a higher threshold that more fully represents the weight range of U.S. children younger than 6. CR also tested some dressers 30 inches and shorter, a slice of the market currently not covered by the voluntary standard.

CR's investigation concluded that the industry standard is inadequate. At the same time, a majority of the dressers CR tested passed the 60-pound test.

“Clearly, the marketplace has found that one can design a dresser at various prices that is safer and more stable,” says James Dickerson, chief scientific officer at Consumer Reports. (See [“How Stable Is Your Dresser?”](#) below.)

CR's findings underscore that there isn't one formula for greater stability. However, many of the dressers that passed all CR's tests tended to be heavier, back-weighted, deeper dressers with less drawer extension. Perhaps most significantly, CR found that there's no easy way for consumers to simply eye a dresser and tell whether it is likely to tip over. A more effective and mandatory standard would help consumers trust that dressers for sale in the U.S. would resist tipping over onto young children.

Through interviews with parents of victims and with industry representatives, CR also found that the most effective prevention strategy available today, [anchoring dressers to walls using brackets and straps](#), isn't an easy option for families less proficient with tools or contending with brick walls. Some parents told CR that they had no idea kits for anchoring dressers even existed.

## Deadly Furniture Tip-Overs: What CR's Investigation Found

**Children alone in their rooms.** Almost half of tip-over deaths (46 percent) happen in the bedroom, sometimes after a child has napped. The CPSC has identified certain “hazard patterns,” including children climbing on open drawers.

**TV hazard.** CR recommends that consumers avoid placing TVs on top of dressers. The CPSC says that 53 percent of reported tip-over fatalities between 2000 and 2016 for children younger than 18 involved TVs and dressers tipping over together.

**Weak tip-over standard.** The industry's voluntary standard leaves too many children at risk. Based on our investigation, CR is calling for the tip-over test weight for dressers to be increased to 60 pounds, from 50 pounds, and for dressers 30 inches tall and shorter to be included in the standard because they also can tip over. Three of the four dressers CR tested that were 30 inches or shorter failed CR's second test.

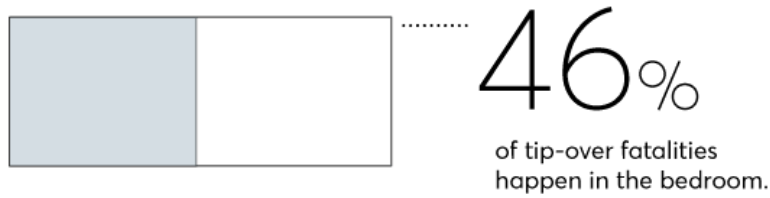
**Industry responsible.** CR thinks the most effective way to prevent tip-overs is to secure dressers to walls. But we recognize that it's not always an option for tenants or those not handy with tools. CR thinks it's the industry's responsibility to ensure safer, more stable dressers and that safety shouldn't rely on consumer skill at anchoring a dresser to a wall.

**Some do it right.** CR's test results show that manufacturers can make dressers stable enough to meet a tougher standard because many already do.

Based on our findings, Consumers Union, the advocacy division of Consumer Reports, is calling on regulators to set a strong, mandatory safety standard, allowing regulators to enforce the rules and more easily gain industry cooperation for recalls. In the meantime, CU thinks the industry should increase the voluntary standard test weight to 60 pounds and include dressers 30 inches and shorter. (See "Where CR Stands: Calling for Tougher Tip-Over Standards," below.) The CR investigation comes as the CPSC this year considers issuing stricter, mandatory safety standards.

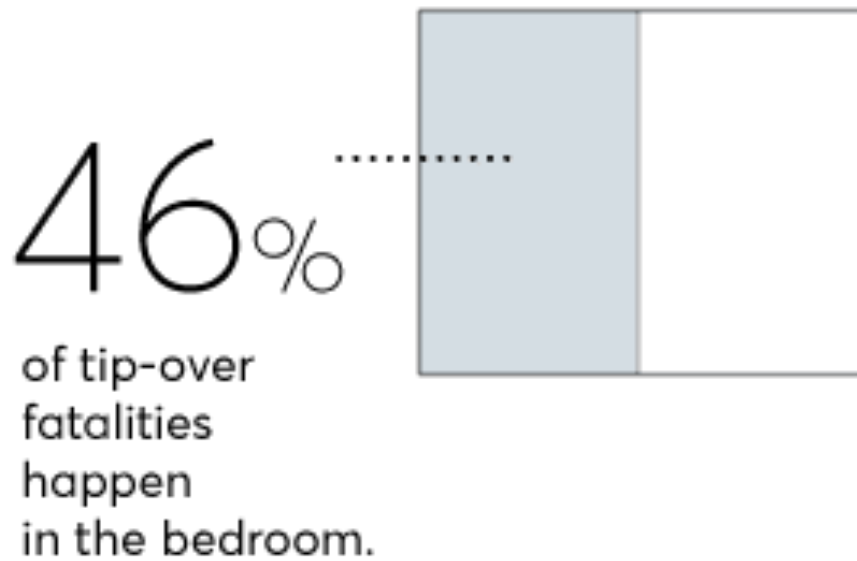
"Our recommendations would lead to safer dressers for all consumers," says William Wallace, senior policy analyst for CU. "Raising the test weight would cover more children, and lowering the minimum height would cover more dressers."

## Where Fatalities Happen



© Consumer Product Safety Commission.

## Where Fatalities Happen



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## The Consumer's Conundrum

Under the current system, consumers must put their trust in manufacturers.

“The normal consumer has no clue,” says Lisa Siefert, a consumer advocate in Barrington Hills, Ill., who founded Shane’s Foundation shortly after her 2-year-old son, Shane, died from a dresser tip-over in 2011. Like McGee, Siefert found her son under his dresser after he had taken a nap. She had assumed the dresser was safe.

Jackie Collas’ 2-year-old son, Curren, died in 2014 after a dresser tipped over onto him in his room at his West Chester, Pa., home. “I just feel like it shouldn’t be left up to the consumer,” Collas says.

Keisha Bowles of Conway, Ark., lost her 2-year-old daughter, Chance, in 2012. Chance and her then-6-year-old brother, Brandon, were playing in and out of each other’s rooms. Bowles was in the bathroom when a dresser with a TV on top of it fell onto Chance, who died later from her injuries. “I had no idea that they made anything to strap down furniture,” Bowles says.

Ann Marie Buerkle, acting chairman of the CPSC, says it’s key to educate consumers about securing dressers and TVs already in their homes. “Even if we put a mandatory standard into effect tomorrow, there are a lot of dressers out there that don’t comply.”

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Kids are dying, and furniture makers are not doing enough.

[Sign our petition telling them to adopt stronger standards.](#)

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## Our Testing of Tip-Overs

The voluntary safety standard for dressers is managed by ASTM International, an independent organization that brings together manufacturers, government officials, academics, retailers, consumers, and others to establish standards for thousands of products and processes. (Consumer Reports is an active member and participates in working groups, including dressers.) Not all

manufacturers participate, and not all comply with its voluntary standards.

In CR's investigation, the Pottery Barn, Epoch Design, and Sauder models we evaluated, among others, passed all three of CR's tests. Other models from various manufacturers passed the first two tests but failed our tougher third test. Five models from three manufacturers—Ameriwood (one model), DaVinci (one model), and South Shore (three models)—did not pass CR's second test.



## Estimated Annual Emergency Department-Treated Injuries

# 30,700

The estimated number of annual emergency department-treated injuries related to furniture, televisions, and appliances tipping over on a person from 2014 through 2016.

© Consumer Product Safety Commission.

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## Estimated Annual Emergency Department- Treated Injuries

# 30,700

The estimated number of annual emergency, department-treated injuries related to furniture, televisions and appliances tipping over on a person from 2014 through 2016.

© Consumer Product Safety Commission.

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Ameriwood and South Shore told CR their dressers meet voluntary industry standards. Three of the four dressers from these manufacturers that failed CR's second test were 30 inches or shorter and would not be subject to the industry's voluntary standard.

DaVinci told CR in an email that the company has already discontinued the model that didn't pass the second test because the company adopted a new 55-pound internal test. "Any items that did not pass were either discontinued or underwent construction changes, which include thicker, heavier back panels," the email said.

CR's testing shows that the industry in many cases could already meet a tougher standard, with 13 of 24 dressers passing the 60-pound test.

"It was just this little, tiny window of time where your life changes forever. Instead of planning his second birthday party that was supposed to be Elmo-themed, we were planning his funeral."

—**JANET MCGEE, APPLE VALLEY, MINN.** McGee's son, Ted, was killed after an Ikea Malm dresser tipped over on him in 2016. Ted was 22 months old.

## Impact on Industry

Still, meeting a new standard would not be a simple adjustment, says Joe Shamie, co-president of Delta Children, a global manufacturer of cribs, furniture, baby gear, and dressers. Shamie says it would mean redesigning dressers and probably additional per-unit costs for back weights and extra shipping charges from Asia. "As it is right now, my costs are more expensive than the guy that does not pass the [voluntary] standards," he says. "If they make the [voluntary] standards tougher, my costs will continue to go up, while his costs will continue to be much lower than mine."

Shamie, who considers himself a dedicated safety advocate, estimates that Delta's budget for safety testing is \$2 million per year. "The company culture is set around safety and corporate and social responsibility," says Shamie, whose father started the business in 1968. "It's not about the letter of the law; it's about using a combination of some common sense and seeing how it could apply further. Because children do things that we don't anticipate."

Five of the dresser models CR tested were from Delta. Three passed all three tests, and two passed Tests 1 and 2 but failed CR's 60-pound test.

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### How Often Does a Tip-Over Injury Happen?



17 minutes

That's how often someone in the U.S. is injured by furniture, a TV, or an appliance falling on them.

© Consumer Product Safety Commission.

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In addition to Delta, CR contacted dozens of other furniture manufacturers and retailers to ask a series of questions about design changes, testing, and current safety standards. Of the 13 manufacturers that responded in full and also produce dressers, eight said they want a mandatory standard. Why? “To keep consumers safe and require a level playing field across all suppliers,” David P. DaPonte, senior manager of global quality assurance and testing at L.L.Bean, said in a written response.

Laura Wood, international sourcing coordinator at Lexington Home Brands, says a mandatory standard would eliminate confusion and debate. “Incidents continue to occur because compliance with the standard, and more specifically understanding of the standard, is not consistent,” she says. “I think [issuing a mandatory standard] could certainly clarify for industry that a mandatory standard is mandatory—you have to do it.”



## Have you had a furniture tip-over incident?

Not everyone knows that large furniture—like dressers or chests—can tip over and cause injuries, especially to young children. Have you had a furniture tip-over incident in your home? Please tell us what piece of furniture fell, how it happened, and whether it caused injury to you or a loved one.

Share Your Story

### Who Should Be Protected?

Consumer advocates, including CR, think setting a new tip-over testing standard that is reasonable should be based on protecting more at-risk children. A mandatory, 60-pound standard would cover about 95 percent of U.S. children younger than 6 years—a group involved in 82 percent of dresser and clothing storage unit tip-over deaths, according to the CPSC.

Even so, some in the industry say that the current voluntary standard is working and that tip-over mishaps will happen, regardless of new laws or standards.

“Do I think the standard is adequate? Yes, I do believe it’s adequate in protecting the most affected at-risk population,” says Bill Perdue, vice president of regulatory affairs for the American Home Furnishings Alliance, a 400-member industry trade group. “I do, however, believe that there’s always room to improve the standard.”

Perdue contends that tip-over deaths and injuries are largely due to noncompliant products. Tip-over incident reports don’t usually include the dresser model involved, so it’s difficult to tell which specific models are responsible for the incidents. But in the case

of fatalities, some dresser models are singled out for scrutiny by regulators and the industry.

In the case of Ted McGee's death, the Ikea Malm dresser that fell on him was still on the market when he died in February 2016, even though it and another Malm model were linked to the deaths of two toddlers in 2014. Both of those two families filed a lawsuit against Ikea in 2015 and reported the incidents to the CPSC. That same year, Ikea issued free anchor kits and urged consumers to stop using Ikea dressers (27 million at the time) until secured to walls. It wasn't until June 2016, four months after Ted's death, that Ikea issued a recall for the Malm.

The McGees sued Ikea in August that year, and the company settled with them and the other two families that December. Ikea didn't respond to CR requests for comment about Ted's death. But the company stressed in email responses to CR that all Ikea dressers should be secured to walls.

### Percentage of Fatal Tip-Over Incidents Involving Children Younger Than 6

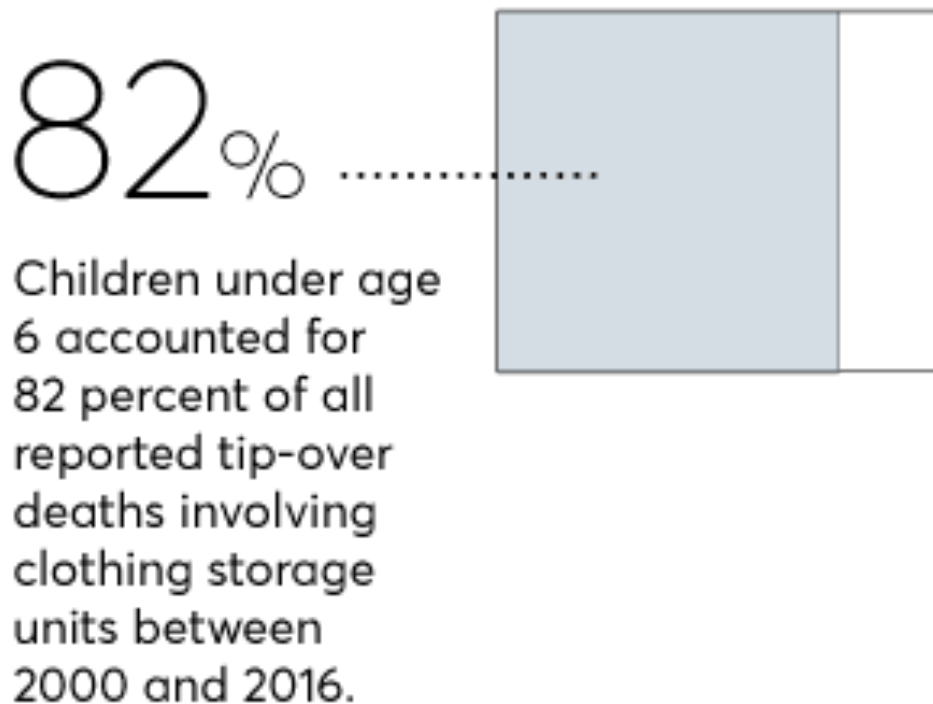


82%

Children under age 6 accounted for 82 percent of all reported tip-over deaths involving clothing storage units between 2000 and 2016.

© Consumer Product Safety Commission.

## Percentage of Fatal Tip-Over Incidents Involving Children Younger Than 6



© Consumer Product Safety Commission.

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Elliot Kaye, commissioner and past chairman of the CPSC, says having a mandatory standard tends to speed up the recall process. In many cases, the CPSC doesn't have the practical resources to quickly force recalls and must either successfully sue or gain industry cooperation.

“With a voluntary standard, where really there's no enforcement mechanism whatsoever, it's truly voluntary,” Kaye says. “Basically what [many in the industry] are saying is let's wait until more children are killed before we have to do anything, and that to me is—that's morally reprehensible. I'm not comfortable waiting . . . when we know that there are concrete changes that can be made now that will save lives.”

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## How Stable Is Your Dresser?

CR conducted tip-over testing on 24 dresser models that represent a cross-section of the retail market, using progressively tougher tests.

They were purchased from May 2017 through February 2018. Our tests show that you can't spot a stable dresser with the naked eye.

#### HOW WE TESTED

























We performed three tests with all the drawers empty.

In **Test 1**, all drawers were open.

















































In **Test 2**, the top drawer was open to its final stop and a 50-pound weight was hung from the drawer front.

























In **Test 3**, the top drawer was open to its final stop and the 50-pound weight was increased in 1-pound increments to a maximum of 60 pounds.

Consumer Reports conducts its tests for the purpose of comparison and not for compliance. Our results are not meant as indicators for whether or not a dresser meets the voluntary industry standard set by ASTM International, a consensus standards-setting organization.

	MODEL	DIMENSIONS	TEST NUMBER		
			1	2	3
	<b>Bob's Discount Furniture Chadwick Chest</b> \$280	H48.25"XW36"XD17" 99.0 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>DaVinci Jayden 4-Drawer Dresser</b> \$280	H37.75"XW36"XD18.75" 87.6 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>DaVinci Kalani 4-Drawer Dresser (discontinued)</b> \$300	H38.25"XW32.75"XD21.25" 83.6 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Delta Children Bentley 6 Drawer Dresser</b> \$340	H33.75"XW49"XD19" 111.0 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Delta Children Clermont 6 Drawer Dresser</b> \$250	H38"XW47.25"XD18.75" 111.6 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Delta Children Sutton 3 Drawer Dresser</b> \$170	H37"XW35"XD19" 83.2 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS



	<b>Delta Children Epic 3 Drawer Dresser</b> \$180	<b>H33"XW36.5"XD18.75"</b> 71.4 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Delta Children 3 Drawer Dresser, similar to: Viv + Rae 3 Drawer Dresser</b> \$280	<b>H33.5"XW37"XD20"</b> 74 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Epoch Design 5 Drawer Chest</b> \$740	<b>H46.25"XW33.75"XD21"</b> 131.2 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Epoch Design Seneca 5 Drawer Chest</b> \$770	<b>H48.25"XW35.75"XD21.25"</b> 164.0 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Essential Home Belmont 4 Drawer Dresser Chest (Ameriwood)</b> \$40	<b>H30"XW27.75"XD15.75"</b> 47.0 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Ikea Malm 3-Drawer Chest</b> \$100	<b>H30.5"XW31.75"XD19"</b> 96.0 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Pottery Barn Kids Catalina Dresser</b> \$500	<b>H31"XW38.5"XD18.75"</b> 89.6 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Pottery Barn Kids Catalina Extra-Wide Dresser</b> \$900	<b>H31.25"XW56.25"XD18"</b> 119.2 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Sauder Pogo 3-Drawer Chest</b> \$180	<b>H47.25"XW30.25"XD19.5"</b> 99.4 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Sauder Shoal Creek 4-Drawer Chest</b> \$230	<b>H42.5"XW34.75"XD18.75"</b> 106.4 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Simmons Kids Rowen Double Dresser</b> \$300	<b>H34"XW47.75"XD19.75"</b> 128.2 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>South Shore Libra 3-Drawer Chest, similar to: Simply Basics</b>	<b>H27.5"XW31.5"XD16"</b> 57.2 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS

	<b>3 Drawer Dresser</b> \$90				
	<b>South Shore Little Treasures 5-Drawer Chest</b> \$165	H43.75"XW31.5"XD18" 89.8 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser A</b> \$200	H29.75"XW47.5"XD17.5" 103.6 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>South Shore Logik 6-Drawer Double Dresser B</b> \$200	H27.5"XW51.25"XD19" 108.6 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>South Shore Summer Breeze 6-Drawer Double Dresser A</b> \$270	H32"XW52.25"XD16.5" 111.6 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>South Shore Summer Breeze 6-Drawer Double Dresser B</b> \$230	H31.25"XW52"XD20" 113.2 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS
	<b>Storkcraft Kenton 6 Drawer Universal Double Dresser</b> \$220	H32.5"XW50"XD18" 102.2 LB.	 Drawers Open	 50 LBS	 60 LBS

Notes: 1) Some models have the same name with a modifier ("A" or "B"). The latter sample (B) was found to have different dimensions from the earlier sample (A). This is reflected in both dimensions and test results. 2) Dimensions are overall dimensions of the assembled product rounded up to the nearest ¼ inch, measured by CR technicians, including any additional components, such as a changing table or hardware. These dimensions may differ from what appears in the manufacturers' specifications. 3) Purchase price may vary from the currently available price.

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Notes: 1) Some models have the same name with a modifier ("A" or "B"). The latter sample (B) was found to have different dimensions from the earlier sample (A). This is reflected in both dimensions and test results. 2) Dimensions are overall dimensions of the assembled product rounded up to the nearest 1/4 inch, measured by CR technicians, including any additional components, such as a changing table or hardware. These dimensions may differ from what appears in the manufacturers' specifications. 3) Purchase price may vary from the currently available price.

## Where CR Stands: Calling for Tougher Tip-Over Standards

Consumer Reports recommends that consumers anchor dressers to the wall. But CR also is calling on regulators to set stronger, mandatory tip-over testing standards. In the meantime, industry

should take steps to strengthen the current voluntary standard in these key ways:

**Protect more children.** The current standard—an empty dresser must not tip over when 50 pounds is hung from an open drawer—doesn't cover enough children and should be increased to 60 pounds, which would cover 95 percent of children younger than 6, according to the CPSC.

**Include shorter dressers.** The standard should be expanded to cover units 30 inches tall and shorter because CR's investigation shows that some of these dressers can tip over.

**Labeling.** If the standard is strengthened, as we recommend, manufacturers should clearly mark products to reflect that they meet the new standard.

**Congress should act, if needed.** If manufacturers don't agree to toughen the voluntary standard, the CPSC should issue a mandatory standard. This process could take years without industry cooperation. Congress, however, could speed things up. The STURDY (Stop Tip-overs of Unstable, Risky Dressers on Youth) Act, introduced in 2016 by Sens. Bob Casey, D-Pa., Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., would have directed the CPSC to issue a stronger, mandatory standard if industry failed to adequately strengthen its voluntary standard within 180 days. The bill did not pass. Policymakers and industry should act quickly on our findings and issue a tougher standard.

**Editor's Note:** This article also appeared in the May 2018 issue of Consumer Reports magazine.

## Keeping Kids Safe From Furniture Tip-Overs

A danger might be lurking right in your home. On the 'Consumer 101' TV show, Consumer Reports' expert Peter Anzalone explains

**to show host Jack Rico what consumers need to know about  
furniture tip-overs.**

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