



Make it Safe

Blind cord campaign in North Lanarkshire (pilot project)

Final report January 2011

Background and evidence for the campaign

RoSPA typically hears about one or two children dying after becoming tangled in looped blind cords in the UK each year.

Looped cords are a common mechanism on blinds currently fitted in UK homes. They also feature on new products which include blinds that are made-to-measure and those bought “off the shelf”.

Since 2004, RoSPA has called upon the blind industry to take voluntary action to reduce the risk of looped cords and we are now working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), CEN (the European Committee for Standardisation), the British Blind and Shutter Association (BBSA) and the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) to investigate design modifications and raise awareness of the dangers.

Research

At least 15 under-5s have died in blind cord accidents in the UK since 1999 (5 in 2010) and there are likely to be many more near misses. UK injuries are not reported systematically, but cases in the US show children can be severely disabled or left in a coma after blind cord entanglement.

Even though the number of deaths per year is small, these deaths are happening with predictable regularity and RoSPA finds itself returning to this easily-preventable accident issue time and time again. A number of MPs and coroners have called for a ban on looped blind cords. Following the tragic death of Scottish toddler, Muireann McLaughlin, Sheriff David Mackie criticised the general lack of awareness and called for a public information campaign to highlight the risks.



Steering Group

North Lanarkshire provided a geographical area for a pilot campaign to ensure the public is aware of the dangers. Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service were keen to be involved and North Lanarkshire Council has an active home safety unit which is ideally placed to reach homes that would benefit from this campaign. A fitting service is also available in this area.

The steering group set up to take the pilot forward was made up of representatives from RoSPA, North Lanarkshire Council's home safety unit, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Service and North Lanarkshire Council's Safer Homes project, which was delivered locally by The Wise Group.

Funding

This campaign was enabled through RoSPA's core funding from the Health and Wellbeing Directorate of the Scottish Government and an additional £3,000 from both the Scottish Government's Community Safety Unit and Child and Maternal Health Division.

Resources

The funding enabled the purchase of 3000 cleats and 15,000 *Make it Safe* leaflets. 3000 of these leaflets were kept for the pilot area with the remainder made available through many channels including at conferences, exhibitions, NHS, social work departments and on request. A quantity has also been distributed amongst members of Home Safety Scotland (practitioners group) and a pdf of the leaflet has been included on local council websites so that awareness can be raised further afield.

Campaign development

The campaign was made possible by the Scottish Government funding and was developed by the steering group. The aim of the campaign was to give information to families to empower them to make informed decisions about buying blinds with looped cords and amend their current practices around existing blinds with looped cords.



The *Make it Safe* leaflets for the campaign were provided through the British Blind and Shutter Association (BBSA) and were modified slightly before agreeing to purchase.

Discussions took place within the steering group with regards as to what safety device should be made available and the decision was made to offer cleats and, where appropriate, to fit them.

Make it Safe

The campaign encouraged everyone to *Make it Safe*. The leaflet advises on how to reduce the risk from looped blind cords and chains through detailing a number of practical, simple precautions that can be taken. Along with cleats, examples of other safety devices are included so people can make an informed choice of what will best suit their needs.

Timeframes

The campaign was launched by the Minister for Community Safety in June 2010 at Wishaw General Hospital. It ran for 6 months from July 2010 – December 2010 in a targeted approach via home safety visits, talks and open day events in North Lanarkshire.

The Campaign outcomes

The campaign distributed leaflets and cleats across North Lanarkshire to raise awareness of the dangers of looped blind cords and chains.

Leaflets were distributed in several different ways e.g. through home visits by Strathclyde Fire and Rescue service and the local home safety officer as well as being made available at local events including open days at the local fire station, weaning fairs, and talks to parents. Cleats were also made available at these events as well as being distributed by the Council's home safety officer. The Safer Homes team, who offer a small repair and fitting service, was available to fit any cleats into qualifying households as well as deliver the leaflets to the households that the staff were scheduled to visit. Around 230 cleats were distributed by Safer Homes with approximately 180 actually fitted.



Evaluation of the campaign

The evaluation of this campaign, facilitated by RoSPA, was undertaken through telephone interviews by the call centre of the Wise Group. A total of 194 calls resulted in a 40.7% response rate. Due to the short timeframe that this campaign operated for it was decided that only those who received cleats would be part of the evaluation as it would have been too time consuming to monitor where all the leaflets had gone to. The evaluation results show that:

- 82% of respondents had blinds with looped cords in their home at the time of receiving the cleat and leaflet. When asked if the cleat had been fitted, 63% answered yes. Reasons for the cleats not being fitted included not finding the time to do it, “husband doesn’t want to drill holes in the walls” and “haven’t got round to it yet as child is still only a baby”.
- Since receiving the *Make it Safe* information the question was asked “If you were to buy a set of blinds for your home, how likely is it that you would buy blinds with looped cords?” 60% were unlikely to buy blinds with looped cords. Reasons for this included comments such as “not very likely because of the information given on the day about blind cords” and “...educated and look for alternatives”. However, 29% of respondents indicated that they were still likely to buy blinds with looped cords.
- Since receiving the *Make it Safe* information it has not been possible to determine whether practices have changed within households, such as the moving of furniture, as responses referred only to practices relating to the actual blind or cords e.g. “tied up cord until new cleat fitted”.
- 43% of respondents were not aware of the information surrounding blind cord safety before they received the *Make it Safe* information. 69% of total replies have however discussed the risk of blind cords with other parents or carers.
- Feedback from the Steering Group has indicated that RoSPA was well placed to facilitate the campaign. Comments include “From both a strategic and operational perspective it was crucial that RoSPA facilitated the blind cord campaign” and “...ensured that the campaign was focused, and effectively communicated to all the stakeholders involved with the campaign in order to achieve its aims and objectives”.



- Other comments on the campaign include:
 - “very appreciative of information and cleat”
 - “very worthwhile cause that will save so many lives of children”
 - “a very useful leaflet which I have passed onto my friend”
 - “awareness should be raised to a higher level as I never thought about this issue until the event. The programme should be rolled out on a bigger scale”

Conclusions and recommendations

The campaign has in effect made homes safer with the distribution of the cleats and *Make it Safe* leaflets. Recipients have been educated on the dangers of looped cords and have made use of the cleats. There were requests from the Steering Group for more *Make it Safe* leaflets and cleats as the initial supply of 3,000 had been exhausted before the end of the campaign.

Positive feedback was given on the facilitation of the campaign with RoSPA being well placed to be involved in the coordination of any future campaigns.

However, RoSPA suggests that partner roles need to be more defined, perhaps through a written partner agreement at the start of the project detailing what is expected of all the partners and the timeframes in which activities are to be undertaken.

There is a need for the campaign to continue and ensure that people are aware of the dangers and they are given the information required to make an informed choice on any future purchases. RoSPA would also like to see the campaign being extended to other areas across Scotland to ensure carers of young children are further educated on the importance of amending their current unsafe practices around looped blind cords.

Jennifer Henderson, Home Safety Officer, RoSPA Scotland, January 31, 2011