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April 20, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

I write to urge you to take meaningful action to protect military families from the hidden dangers involving window-covering cords. Nearly every month for the past two decades, a child has died from strangulation by an accessible window covering cord. An accessible window covering cord includes any operational, pull or internal cord that a child could wrap around their neck. These incidents, which occur when an infant or toddler becomes entangled in a hazardous loop from a window covering with an accessible cord, happen in a matter of seconds and silently—victims are unable to cry out for help.

The latest tragic incident happened just last month, when a seven-year-old was found dead, tangled in window-blind cords that were standard issue in his family's military housing at Fort Detrick in Maryland. Military families are bound by unique circumstances that may make them particularly vulnerable to this hazard. Based on data from the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), which I have enclosed with this letter, there have been *at least* six fatal strangulations in military housing and four near-fatal strangulations since 1996. The actual number of incidents is likely higher, since there is no way of knowing whether an incident took place in military housing unless the investigator specifies the type of dwelling. One military housing facility, the Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, NC, was the site of three of these incidents over the course of just five years.¹

Children under five years of age are most at risk of death or serious injury from strangulation due to window-covering cords, and they also make up a large percentage of all military children.² In addition, long and multiple deployments of a military parent exacerbate the challenges of childcare, making it difficult to provide the constant supervision necessary wherever there is a window covering with an accessible cord. Furthermore, the practicalities of serving in the military—not knowing how long you will be stationed at a particular base and the frequent relocations—often make leasing military housing, and accepting whatever window covering it comes with, the only sensible option for a family.

¹ Incidents occurred in 2008, 2011, and 2012.

² Department of Defense. 2013 Demographics Report. "Of the 1,888,486 total military children in 2013, the largest percentage are between birth and 5 years of age (37.4%)..."

<http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2013-Demographics-Report.pdf>

Consequently, it is shocking that military housing not only is frequently furnished with window coverings with dangerous accessible cords, but also often prohibit changing out window coverings and fine households that do so on a “per window” basis. Strangulation deaths by window-covering cords are entirely preventable. Furthermore, thanks to commitments by lower cost retailers like IKEA, Target, and Wal-Mart to no longer sell window coverings with accessible cords, replacing dangerous window coverings can be done affordably.

Accordingly, I urge the Department of Defense (DoD) to take action to eliminate the window-covering cord threat to military children. Military households should have the right to replace their window coverings so that they are child-safe. As DoD renews and negotiates new contracts with its military housing partners, I urge you to ensure that the replacement of dangerous window coverings in households with young children is prioritized. In addition, I respectfully request you report back the following information:

1. A spreadsheet of all military housing and whether or not window coverings installed in each community is safe for young children (contains no accessible cords).
 - a. For military housing with window coverings with accessible cords, whether tenants are allowed to replace window coverings without penalty.
2. Any action DoD has taken to replace dangerous window coverings in military housing.
3. Any education and outreach DoD has conducted to make sure military families are aware of the risks of window coverings with accessible cords.

Servicemembers sign up to serve their country knowing they may be put in harm’s way, but they do not expect this to also apply to their children, and certainly not in their own home. I trust you agree that the DoD has a duty to do as much as it can to make the homes for military families as safe as possible. I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

Enc: Window Covering Incidents Related to Military Housing.

Window Covering Incidents Related to Military or Low-Income Housing

Time period: 1999 to present

Data Source: Reported Incidents to CPSC

CPSC staff searched the following databases for identification of window covering cord incidents: the Injury or Potential Injury Incident file (PII), the Death Certificates file (DTHS), and the In-Depth Investigation file (INDP).

One incident location was identified by CPSC investigator as a low-income housing complex; one incident occurred in Guam, and the rest occurred either in military housing or within a military family in the United States.

Note that unless the investigator specifies the type of dwelling, we usually do not have a way of collecting information on low-income housing.

ID#	State	City	Military or HUD	Date of Incident	Disposition	Narrative
010510CNE6334	NC	FAYETTEVILLE	Homeowner (grandmother) works at Fort Bragg	5/8/2001	Death	A boy, age 3, died after he became entangled with a window blind cord around his neck.
030421CCC2409	TX	EL PASO	Military housing	2/12/2003	Death	A girl, age 4, died after she became entangled with cords from mini blinds wrapped around her neck.
030311CWE5004	GUAM	DEDEDO	Father works for U.S. Air Force	3/4/2003	Death	A girl, age 3, died after she became entangled in a beaded chain of a vertical blind.
080310CCC1480	NC	LEJEUNE	Military housing	2/15/2008	Death	A girl, age 4, died after she became entangled in a beaded chain of a vertical blind.
081112HWE7844	HI	WAHIAWA	Military housing	4/8/2008	Death	A boy, age 3, died of strangulation. He was strangled within the loop of an operating cord for a window blind that was installed over his bedroom window in his home. The victim accessed the window cord by standing on the top of his bed, which was located adjacent to the window and the blinds.
090410CCC2531	GA	FORT BENNING	Military housing	4/8/2009	Treated and Released	A 5-year-old girl climbed up on the headboard & lifted the blinds, which made the cord longer and wrapped it around her neck but then slipped off the headboard. She was found entangled by her mother, who lifted her feet to the headboard and cut down the cord.
100708CWE2246	MT	GREAT FALLS	Low-income housing complex	6/6/2010	Death	A girl, age 3, died after becoming entangled in the operating cords of a mini blind, installed by their landlord. The window was located above a full-size mattress that the victim shared with her brother in an upstairs bedroom.
110601CNE0001	NC	CAMP LEJEUNE	Landlord, as well as the father, are in the military	3/3/2011	Brain Damage	A girl, age 3, strangled on a window blind. The child was in the hospital for more than a month and has significant brain damage.
120501CCC1644	NC	JACKSONVILLE	Father is an active duty Marine	4/12/2012	Near Miss	A boy, age 2, became caught in the cord of a 2" horizontal blind tilt cord. He was able to free himself, but the cord left him with a significant ligature mark on his neck.
140305CBB1435	MD	ROCKVILLE	Physician military father deployed at the time	4/10/2014	Death	A boy, age 2, was strangled by the inner cord of a Roman shade. The victim apparently climbed onto a chair beside a window in his bedroom and placed his head through an inner cord loop at the back of the shade.

Incidents Involving Children & Window Cords on Military Bases

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STATE	CITY	AGE	GENDER	SUMMARY
NC	Camp Lejeune	2.5 years	M	Child gained access to cord in his bedroom placed it around his neck and wangled briefly. No serious injury but ligiture mark around the neck. Parents rent off post from Century 21. Blinds look Pre-1995.
TN	Clarksville	3 years	F	Child reached the one corded operational blind from the couch and wrapped it around her neck. She fell off the couch and strangled.
NC	Camp Lejeune	3 years	F	Child gained access to window cord placed it around her neck and strangled. Mother found child, called 911. She was revived and driving to hospital wear she remained for 2 months. Child has brain damage.
IL	North Chicago	18 months	M	Boy was found in crib with loop around his neck.
VA	Norfolk	3 years	M	Tie down device broke.
HI	Wahiawa	3 years	M	Child opened window covering by standing on his bed frame. He strangled on the loops above the Cord Connector. Military housing.
VA	Yorktown	3 years	M	3-year old male found by mother, unresponsive and hanging from loop part of single outer cord of window blind in victim's room. Victim was playing in his room when mother last saw him prior to taking a shower (<30 minutes). Victim transported to ER, died 2 days later.

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STATE	CITY	AGE	GENDER	SUMMARY
TX	Fort Bliss	4 years	F	4-year old girl was left unattended to watch TV. She climbed up on couch next to window with pulled up mini-blind to look outside, something she always did. Mother found her sitting on arm of couch with mini-blind cord wrapped around her neck. It appears she was playing with pull cord, got entangled in it and accidentally strangled herself. Cord was twisted and wrpped ontome around victim's neck. DOA. Window blind in up position, with locks of cord hanging down. Military housing; single-family dwelling. Three months earlier mother had seen child playing with cord, took it away and tucked it up out of reach, and put daughter in "time out." Victim: 38 1/2", 43 lbs. Mini-blinds described as old. spin strangulation; 4-string nylon lift control cord, connected at bottom with 1 plastic tassel.
KS	Fort Leavenworth	3 years	M	3-year old boy wrapped venetian blind cord around his neck. He suffered a red mark around his throat. Child development cetner. Caregiver heard child running around school room screaming, released him without serious injury. Following this incident, all blinds werre removed from the facility.
TX	Forth Worth	3 years	M	3-year old male suffered anoxia when he became tangled in pull cords of window blind over sliding glass door. Hospitalized, then released - no permanent injury. 7-year old sister found him, removed cord and administered CPR! Rental apartment - Mother had previously cut cord and made it two separate strings but apartment management had replaced it with another 2-part continuous cord with a single tassel. Warning or design fix: Parent had tried to fix, but management had replaced cord with original continuous loop.
MD	Andrews AFB	8 months	F	8-month old female was found in her crib near window, hanging with mini-blind cord wrapped around her neck. Died next day. Victim: 21 lbs., 28". Mini-blinds in closed position. Military housing. Also curtains.