

# Estates and Facilities Alert

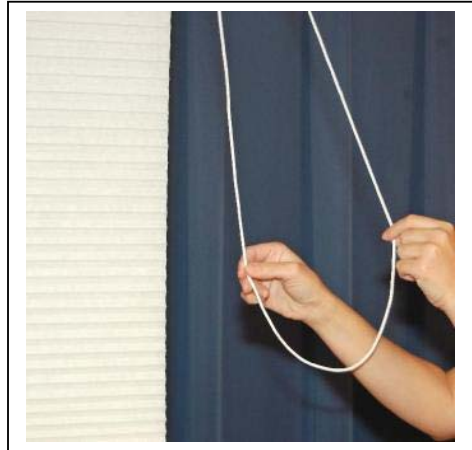


## Action

Ref: EFA/2010/007 Issued: 8 July 2010  
Gateway Reference: 14535

## Device

**Window blinds with looped cords or chains. All types.**



## Problem

Looped cords and chains on window blinds can present a strangulation hazard to children and vulnerable adults.

There have been a number of deaths associated with these types of blind cords throughout the UK.

## Action

Risk assessments should be carried out on looped blind cords, primarily in healthcare environments where children and vulnerable adults are commonly present.

## Action by

Risk managers, staff and contractors involved in the specification, installation, maintenance or risk assessment of window blind systems. The suggested onward distribution list should be noted.

## Contact

Further advice may be obtained from the British Blind and Shutter Association (BBSA).

BBSA website: <http://www.bbsa.org.uk/>

Their website has a section on [safety issues](#)

## Background

1. Incidents and fatalities in domestic settings continue to be reported involving children and looped blind cords / chains. Since 1990 the incidence of deaths of children, mainly under 4 years of age, by strangulation associated with blind cords has been one per year, primarily within a domestic environment.
2. When a child becomes entangled or suspended by the neck in a looped cord, death or serious injury can occur quickly. This is particularly true for children under 4 years old.
3. In May 2009, following a Fatal Accident Inquiry into the death of 2½ year old Muireann McLaughlin, Sheriff David Mackie made the following statements in his determination:

*“It was the pathologist’s chilling evidence that death in such circumstances can occur in a matter of 15 to 20 seconds or a little longer.”*

*“The means of avoiding or minimising the risk associated with free hanging looped blind cords [are] known and understood. They are, in the main, simple and cheap.”*
4. The British Blind and Shutter Association (BBSA) have a section on Safety Issues on their website and has produced two safety information leaflets: Making Blinds Even Safer and Make it Safe. Both these leaflets are appended to this Alert.

## Problem

5. Although no incidents have been reported, children are at risk from looped blind cords in some healthcare environments, for example, health centres, waiting rooms, paediatric departments etc.
6. Considering the extremely short period of time in which a child can suffer injury or death, it would be unwise of healthcare establishments to rely solely on supervision of children by parents or staff.
7. The BBSA website gives the following advice:

*“Complete elimination of the strangulation risk can only be achieved by keeping cords, chains, and tapes and similar out of the reach of children. Use of additional safety devices may reduce the risk of strangulation but cannot be considered foolproof”.*
8. In addition to looped blind cords, there may also be other potential hazards, such as chains along the bottom of vertical blinds, which should also be considered.

## Action

9. Risk assessments should be carried out on looped blind cords, particularly in healthcare environments where children and vulnerable adults are commonly present, but also in other risk areas.
10. All blind cords and chains deemed to be a hazard for children should be modified and/or secured out of their reach. The BBSA leaflets accompanying this Alert provide options for reducing associated risks.

11. Where new blinds are being specified, it is recommended that preference be given to blind systems without looped cords or chains.
12. Best practice requires healthcare organisations to take a holistic approach and conduct regular risk assessment of the environment for patients who are at risk and should update the assessment criteria in the light of any new information. Where the users of the premises are children, there is a greater duty of care to ensure their safety.

## Suggested Onward Distribution

- Accident & Emergency
- Accommodation Officers
- Capital Planning & Design
- Care for the Elderly
- Community Care
- Estates/Facilities
- General Medical Practitioners
- General Dental Practitioners
- Health & Safety
- Health Centres
- Out Patients
- Paediatrics
- Psychiatry
- Risk Management
- Safety Representatives
- Social Services

## Additional Information for England

The above sections of this Alert were compiled by Health Facilities Scotland and distributed nationally without modification.

Action required by this alert should be **underway by: 9<sup>th</sup> August 2010**

Action required by this alert should be **completed by: 4<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

Enquires should quote reference number EFA/2010/007 and be addressed to:

### Defects & Failures

Department of Health  
Estates & Facilities Division 3N12  
Quarry House,  
Quarry Hill,  
Leeds LS2 7UE  
[Mb-defects&failures@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Mb-defects&failures@dh.gsi.gov.uk)

### HOW TO REPORT DEFECTS & FAILURES

Defects and failures relating to non-medical equipment, plant and buildings should be reported to the Department as soon as possible. Advice on how to report can be found in DH (2008) 01. Defect and failure reporting forms and an on-line reporting facility are available on the NHS Information Centre website at [www.ic.nhs.uk](http://www.ic.nhs.uk)

This Alert can be found on the following websites  
<http://www.dh.gov.uk> and <https://www.cas.dh.gov.uk>

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Addressees may take copies for distribution within their own organisations

safety

# Making Blinds Even Safer

There are several ways in which the small but potential dangers of free hanging blind cords can be reduced. Below we show the options which Eclipse Blind Systems offer to its customers. They are typical of the solutions available throughout the trade.

Cord Safety		SAFETY FEATURES			
		CORD CLEAT	CORD SECURING CLIP	CHAIN TASSEL	CORD STOP
					
Can be used with Vertical, Venetian, Roller, Pleated and Roman blinds. This simple device is attached high onto an adjacent wall. The cords can then be completely wound round it, out of a child's reach.	This 'P-shaped' clip can be used with Vertical, Roller and Roman blinds. Mount it onto an adjacent wall and secure the cord/chain so that the loop cannot be easily reached.	For use with Vertical, Roller, Venetian and Roman blinds. You can eliminate the chain loop by using a single length of chain with tassels attached to each end.	Specifically for Venetian blinds, the cord stop is attached at the top of the control cord. Should undue pressure be placed on the cord running through the slats, the control cord will not feed back through the headrail to form a loop.		
Suitable for: Vertical • Venetian Roller • Pleated Roman	Suitable for: Vertical • Roller Roman	Suitable for: Vertical • Venetian Roller • Roman	Suitable for: Venetian		
BREAKAWAY TASSEL	MONO CONTROL	ULTRA WAND	CHAINLESS VANES	INTU PLEATED AND VENETIAN	
					
Primarily suited to Venetian blinds, the tassel will break apart if put under any undue pressure. Two separate cords mean that there is no potentially hazardous loop.	Mono control is a key safety feature of Vertical blinds. The chain and cord, used to rotate the vanes and open and close the blind, are replaced by a single rod.	Ultra wand combines tilting and raising/lowering of the Venetian blind into one control. When the blind is raised, lift cords can be wrapped around the cleats attached to the wand, eliminating free-hanging cords.	You can request sewn-in bottom weights on your Vertical blind, eliminating the need for potentially hazardous bottom chains. Chainless vanes are a standard feature of PVC Vertical and SoftSheer blinds.	INTU blinds are specially designed without hanging cords so are particularly child safe.	
Suitable for: Venetian	Suitable for: Vertical	Suitable for: Venetian	Suitable for: Vertical	Suitable for: Venetian • Pleated	

Text and images kindly supplied by Eclipse Blind Systems.





**The British Blind and Shutter Association**  
 The BBSA is Britain's only trade association representing companies that manufacture and supply interior and exterior blinds, awnings, security grills and shutters. The Association has always taken a leading role in encouraging the highest possible standards of product, service and safety. Every member is required to comply with a strict code of practice. The BBSA is a major contributor to the development of European standards (CEN) which includes references to blind cord safety.



**The CEN official standard**  
 "Complete elimination of the strangulation risk can only be achieved by keeping cords, chains, and tapes and similar out of the reach of children. Use of additional safety devices may reduce the risk of strangulation but cannot be considered foolproof. Motorisation eliminates the risk associated with looped and pull-cord operating mechanisms but the risk relating to inner tapes and cords (for relevant products) remains. Persons in charge of children are ultimately responsible for following the safety instructions provided by the manufacturer."

Your local BBSA member



British Blind and Shutter Association © 2009  
 PO Box 232, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 9AR  
 e-mail: info@bbsa.org.uk  
 web-site: www.bbsa.org.uk

v3, 09/09



## Window Blind Cord Safety

Window blind cords and chains can pose a risk for babies, children and vulnerable people who could injure or even strangle themselves on the hanging looped cords.

**You can take a number of practical, simple precautions to significantly reduce the risk.**

Secure looped cords and chains using one of the available safety devices. Typical examples are:

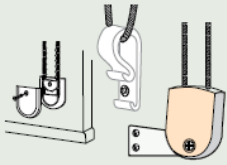
### Cleat

This should be securely fixed to an adjacent wall, out of the reach of children, and the cord/chain secured as shown, after each operation of the blind.



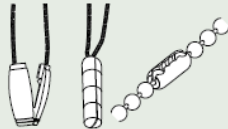
### Cord/Chain Tidys

The following devices are secured to an adjacent wall and the cords/chains are held permanently within the device.



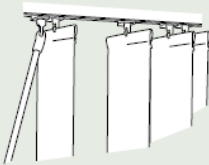
### Chain-break connector or Safety tassel

These will break apart when undue pressure is applied to the operating chain or cord.



### Wand

Removes the need for cords to operate the blind.



Make sure all cords and chains are secured out of reach.



Do not place your child's cot, bed, highchair or playpen near to a window blind.



Do not put sofas, chairs, table, shelves or bookcases near to a window blind, as children love to climb.

make it safe

*"Persons in charge of children are ultimately responsible for following the safety instructions provided by the manufacturer." CEN Standard*

**make it safe!**

Always consult a BBSA member  
 Look for the logo



They will give you the best possible advice on the most appropriate choice of blinds, and the best ways to make them safer. They will also be pleased to give you further information about types of window blinds that are specially designed to be operated without cords. Find your local member by visiting [www.bbsa.org.uk](http://www.bbsa.org.uk)