

Move afoot in Congress to ban drop-side cribs

May 23 2010, By JENNIFER C. KERR , Associated Press Writer



This Sept. 2004 photo provided by the Cirigliano family shows six-month-old Bobby Cirigliano sitting on the lap of his father Robert Cirigliano, on Long Ikand, N.Y. Bobby Cirigliano died in his drop-side crib in 2004. (AP Photo/Cirigliano Family)

(AP) -- The baby crib, usually a safe haven for little ones, became a death trap for 6-month-old Bobby Cirigliano. The side rail on his drop-side crib slid off the tracks and trapped his head and neck between the mattress and the malfunctioning side rail. His face pressed against the mattress, the boy suffocated.

"I just don't feel complete anymore," says his mother, Susan Cirigliano

of North Bellmore on New York's Long Island.

Bobby was one of at least 32 infants and toddlers since 2000 who suffocated or were strangled in a drop-side crib, which has a side that moves up and down to allow parents to lift children from the cribs more easily than cribs with fixed sides. Drop-sides, around for decades and probably slept in by many of today's parents, are suspected in an additional 14 infant fatalities during that time.

The [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#), which regulates cribs, has warned about the problem. Its chairman, Inez Tenenbaum, has pledged to ban the manufacture and sale of cribs by the end of the year with a new performance standard that would make fixed-side cribs mandatory. It could be several months into 2011 before becoming effective.

The industry has already started phasing out drop-sides and big retailers such as Babies R Us and Wal-Mart have taken them off sale floors. Yet there are still plenty for sale on the Internet, and that's part of the reason Congress is getting involved.

"There's a great urgency here. We have to make sure that no parent is unaware that drop-side cribs could kill their children," Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said in an Associated Press interview.

She plans to introduce legislation this week to outlaw the manufacture, sale and resale of all drop-side cribs and ban them from day-care centers and hotels. Gillibrand wants to accelerate efforts for a ban, from Congress or the CPSC, and highlight concerns about the cribs to parents who are using them.

"There still are thousands and thousands of children who are sleeping every night in drop-side cribs and we need to protect them," said Gillibrand.

She outlined her bill at a news conference in New York on Sunday, joined by Bobby Cirigliano's parents and the family of 10-month-old Tyler Witte, who died in a drop-side crib in 1997.

More than 7 million of these cribs have been recalled in the past five years, often because screws, safety pegs or plastic tracking for the rail can come loose or break. The industry insists that babies are safe in drop-sides that haven't been recalled.

"We believe firmly that when these products are assembled and used properly, they are the safest place to put your child," said Mike Dwyer, executive director of the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association, which represents over 90 percent of the crib industry.

But when the hardware malfunctions, the drop-side rail can detach partially from the crib. That creates a dangerous "V"-like gap between the mattress and side rail where a baby can get caught and suffocate or strangle.

Dwyer says manufacturers have seen cases where parents installed the drop-side improperly, sometimes upside down, or they have reassembled a crib for a second or third child with some of the screws or other hardware missing.

In addition to the CPSC's pledge to vote on a ban by year's end, two New York counties - Nassau and Suffolk, on Long Island - have banned the sale of drop-sides.

Late last year, crib manufacturers were already moving in that direction when they voted to eliminate the drop-side design and instead opt for four fixed sides, but the standard is a voluntary one.

Despite the industry's move to end production, there are plenty of new

and used drop-side cribs for sale online. The Associated Press found drop-sides for purchase on websites for Sears, Kmart and Amazon.com. Craigslist also had scores of used drop-side cribs for sale.

The industry doesn't have figures on how many drop-sides might still be on the market, but Dwyer says it's a small percentage.

A ban - by Congress or the CPSC - won't come soon enough for Bobby Cirigliano's parents or his sister, Jennifer, who was 3-years-old when her brother died. She remembers him every day, her parents say. When the family moved to their new house on Long Island, her dad promised to build her a tree house.

"I want it as high as the sky," she told her dad, "because then I can see my little brother."

Online:

Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association: <http://www.jpma.org>

CPSC crib information: <http://www.cpsc.gov/info/cribs/recalls.html>

House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing:
<http://tinyurl.com/23nz82g>

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