

Lawmakers look to ban drop-side cribs

May 25 2010, By JENNIFER C. KERR , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Cribs with a side rail that moves up and down so parents can lift children from them more easily would be banned under legislation aimed at reducing infant deaths.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., introduced a bill late Monday to outlaw the sale and manufacture of the cribs following the deaths of at least 32 infants and toddlers who suffocated or were strangled in drop-side cribs since 2000. The cribs are suspected in another 14 infant fatalities during that time.

Rep. Joe Crowley, D-N.Y., plans to introduce similar legislation this week in the House.

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 being used in homes and day cares.

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

Gillibrand hopes to accelerate efforts for a ban, whether it be from Congress or the CPSC.

The industry says drop-side cribs that haven't been recalled are safe as long as they are used and assembled properly.

More than 7 million drop-side cribs have been recalled in the past five years.

Consumer advocate Don Mays says drop-sides these days are not as sturdy as those of the past.

"The manufacturing of cribs has been outsourced to foreign factories and as a result, in trying to drive costs down and production levels up, they have substituted hardware that is just as not as durable," said Mays, senior director of product safety at Consumers Union, publisher of Consumer Reports.

"They are inferior with regard to durability and inferior with regard to performance," said Mays, whose CU lab tests about 20 cribs a year, and has been testing cribs for more than 20 years.

Older cribs had metal rods that guided the drop-side up and down. Newer cribs have plastic tracking guides for the drop-side that Mays says is more prone to breaking.

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.

Manufacturers also 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 - which can also lead to detachments of the drop-side.

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