



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

Mr Derek Winter  
Her Majesty's Senior Coroner for the City of  
Sunderland  
Room 2.108 Civic Centre  
Burdon Road  
Sunderland SR2 7DN

BIS Ref: REG28/SophieAllen  
Your Ref:

30 July 2014

Dear Mr Winter,

## **REGULATION 28 REPORT TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS**

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths dated 5 June 2014 following your investigation and inquest into the death of Sophie Allen, aged 2 years by accidental death caused by an internal blind cord. May I first say how sorry I was to hear of this tragic accident, and if you have the opportunity would you please convey my deepest sympathies to her family.

In your report you note that, despite the safety campaigns already in place, more needs to be done to increase awareness, especially in homes where blinds are already installed. You also say that you believe the government has the power to take action to prevent future deaths.

However, I believe there is an already established and effective network of partners who are well placed to take preventative action forward, led by the British Blind and Shutters Association (BBSA) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA). Below I outline some of the campaigns planned or already underway.

BIS supports the BBSA's "Make it Safe Campaign" which is run primarily with RoSPA through widespread distribution of the *Make It Safe* brochure, press releases, TV and radio programmes and interviews and use of social networking. Since 2011 the BBSA has produced and distributed 1.6 million *Make It Safe* leaflets (many through RoSPA). They have also produced a video, poster, vehicle and shop window stickers – more information can be found on their website <http://www.makeitsafe.org.uk/> The leaflet has gone to every local authority in Wales and to the main children's organisations (statutory and NGOs).



RoSPA has spearheaded an awareness-raising campaign since 2011 with more than 150 radio and TV broadcasts. They also have a dedicated campaign page (BIS provides some funding) <http://www.rospa.com/about/currentcampaigns/blindcords/> and promoted the issue on breakfast television programmes, such as BBC1's "Breakfast" and ITV's "Daybreak". There has been widespread information promoted across social networking sites including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

In September 2013, the four UK Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) agreed that the CMO in Northern Ireland would lead a group of their respective public health agencies and The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to look at ways in which to reduce blind cord injuries and deaths. The organisations identified for representation on the group are:

- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), Northern Ireland
- Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland
- Health and Social Care, Scottish Government
- Public Health Wales
- Public Health England
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)
- British Blind and Shutter Association (BBSA)

In addition the devolved authorities are taking a wide range of actions to ensure that the message gets across. These include:

- The *Make It Safe* leaflet has been disseminated to every local authority in Wales and to the main children's organisation (statutory and NGOs).
- Children in Wales (CiW) run an accident prevention network for over 500 professionals, policy makers and practitioners. Blind cord risks are included in the bulletins on a regular basis.
- Every health visitor in Wales has also received a copy of the Keep In Mind (KIM) home safety leaflet which includes blind cord safety.
- In Northern Ireland all health visitor contact with families incorporates awareness-raising around accident prevention, including blind cord safety.
- A pilot programme has been established in Northern Ireland whereby Council Registrars raise awareness on blind cord safety when parents register a birth. The Registrar issues a BBSA blind cord safety leaflet and cleats if required (See reference to case study below).
- The Public Health Agency (PHA) in Northern Ireland have placed articles on blind cord safety in various publications including *Birth to Five*, *Parenting NI*, District Council



magazines as well as on the PHA website. PHA has also had the *Make It Safe* leaflet translated into appropriate languages for Northern Ireland.

- In Northern Ireland a 10-year strategy for home accident prevention, which includes particular reference to blind cord safety, will be launched for consultation in the coming weeks. It is expected that the strategy will be published before the end of the year.
- Information on blind cord safety is included in the Health Scotland publication *Ready Steady Baby* which is distributed to all new parents. The *Good Egg Guide to Home Safety* is distributed by Health Visitors at the ten-day visit to new mums and it too contains information on blind cord safety.
- The Scottish Government's Community Safety Policy Unit and Child and Maternal Health colleagues jointly funded a specific prevention campaign to reduce blind cord strangulation in young children. The campaign was launched during Child Safety Week 2010 and saw the distribution of 10,000 leaflets across Scotland. A further 2,000 cleats (these are safety apparatus that are fixed to the wall for cords to be wound round and kept out of reach of young children and are generally retrofitted for blinds already in homes) were distributed, initially in North Lanarkshire. Following evaluation, further funding was made available and the campaign has now been rolled out to a total of 10 Local Authorities. To continue the prevention programme RoSPA has also offered the service to all the remaining Local Authorities across Scotland for a small charge.
- RoSPA in Scotland plan to re-launch the *Make It Safe* campaign and to roll it out to new areas while still supporting those who have covered the issue already.
- Regular reminders are placed in RoSPA Scotland's weekly newsletter and disseminated to practitioners.
- The Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) include blind cord safety on their website in their resources and newsletters

In summary, BIS is committed to promoting blind cord safety. We believe the most effective way of achieving it is through the partnerships and networks I have described above, using all available resources as effectively as possible at local, regional and national levels to reach as much of the population as possible. We are grateful for your report and I would like to assure you that we will continue to work with a wide range of partners to prevent future deaths.

Yours,

**MICHAEL PORTER**