

# New National Safety Standards for Window Coverings Announced

*On January 12, 2018, the Window Covering Manufacturers Association (WCMA) announced the approval of a new window covering safety standard by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The new safety standard, ANSI/WCMA A100.1-2018, strengthens window covering safety by requiring that all stock products sold in stores and online—which account for more than 80 percent of all window coverings products sold in the U.S. and Canada—be cordless or have inaccessible cords.*

The compliance date for the new standard is December 15, 2018. This means that all products manufactured after this date must comply with the new standard, although many manufacturers will likely begin introducing new products based on the new standard earlier in the year.

“The revised safety standard segments the market between stock and custom-made products because U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) incident data shows that requiring stock products to be cordless or have inaccessible cords would have the most significant and immediate impact on reducing the strangulation risk to young children from certain window covering cords,” said WCMA executive director Ralph Vasami.

Based on the new standards, corded window coverings will only be available on custom-order products, although the revised standard imposes new restrictions on these custom-order products. These include requiring operating cords to have a default length of 40 percent of the blind height (currently it is unlimited) and a default to a tilt wand instead of a tilt cord. The new safety standard also includes a change in warning tags to more graphically depict the strangulation hazard.

A WCMA press release announcing the new standards estimates that more than 90 percent of products sold in the U.S. and Canada will be cordless or have inaccessible cords once compliance with the new safety standard is in place. This is based on the supposition belief that many custom-order window coverings are already available with cordless operating systems or have inaccessible cords, along with the fact that stock products make up a large share of the market.

“All companies who manufacture, distribute, or sell window coverings in the U.S. must comply with the voluntary safety standard or face enforcement action by the CPSC and/or be open to legal action if non-compliant products are sold,” said Vasami. “‘Voluntary’ simply signifies that industry worked cooperatively with the CPSC, safety experts, and others under the auspices of ANSI to develop the standard.”

Upon receiving the announcement of the new standards, *Window Fashion Vision* got in touch with the WCMA for a Q&A based on questions from readers.

The inclusion of “voluntary” in the language of these standards has caused a lot of confusion in the industry—as many designers, workrooms, installers, and retailers take it to mean that they can opt-out. Why do the standards continue to use such confusing language?

**WCMA:** The term “voluntary standards,” which refers to the process by which the standard is developed with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), is a statutory term used in the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Act that governs the regulation of consumer products in the United States. It’s a term that has been in use in this country for more than four decades and one that window coverings manufacturers are familiar with since the first window coverings voluntary standard was created in 1996.

That said, and to be crystal clear, compliance with the voluntary standard is mandatory for all manufacturers. All companies who manufacture, distribute, or sell window coverings in the U.S., regardless of whether you make 100 units a week or one unit a week, must comply with the voluntary safety standard or face enforcement action by the CPSC and/or be open to legal action if non-compliant products are sold.

Once again, “voluntary” simply signifies that industry worked cooperatively with the CPSC, safety experts, and others under the auspices of ANSI to develop the standard.

Given the proliferation of “semi-custom” products in the market, how do designers, retailers, installers, etc., know for sure where a product fits on the stock to custom spectrum?

**WCMA:** The common denominator for all stock products is that the product is produced in advance of any consumer order or request for that product.

An FAQ on the WindowCoverings.org site states: "The product can either be sold 'as is' or modified or adjusted by the seller, manufacturer, or distributor prior to being distributed in commerce in the U.S. and it would still be considered a stock blind, shade or shading product." The reference to "modified or adjusted" refers to adjusting what could be done to an existing stock product. Cut down programs typically adjust the width of a stock product. It does not matter if that cut down adjustment is made on the floor of a retail store or in a manufacturer's or distributor's plant. That modified product is still considered a stock product and, in keeping with this new standard, that product must be cordless or have inaccessible cords.

What are the penalties or liabilities if a designer/workroom/retailer/installer sells or installs a product that does not adhere to the standard?

**WCMA:** All companies must comply with the voluntary safety standard or face enforcement action by the CPSC, and/or be open to legal action if non-compliant products are sold. CPSC action can include recalls plus possible civil and criminal penalties. In addition, companies could face state enforcement action as well.

If a company violates a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Act, enforcement is the responsibility of the Consumer Product Safety Commission and could involve the U.S. Justice Department.

WCMA is the standards-setting organization and not an enforcement body. The bottom line is that companies must comply with the safety standard or risk fines, penalties, private litigation, and/or state enforcement actions.

Can a designer/workroom/retailer/installer ask their clients to sign a waiver exempting them from any liability regarding cords on window treatments? Or if there are older corded products in the home that the client does not want to replace?

**WCMA:** Only a business's legal advisor can advise on these issues. WCMA is not qualified to give an opinion on these questions. Companies should obtain an answer to this question from their own legal counsel.

Perhaps one hypothetical installation would be helpful. If a disabled customer in a wheelchair wants a custom made-to-order Roman shade where the lift cord is 12" below the sill and shade (but is still 4 feet off the ground) can this be made without violating the standards? The new standard says "operating cords default length of 40 percent of the blind height." So what would be the default in this case?

**WCMA:** If a consumer does not specifically request a longer cord on a custom-ordered product to meet their special


circumstances, the product is to be made with a cord length equal to 40 percent of the height of the blind or shade. The standards recognize that corded products are still needed by a wide range of consumers, including the elderly and those with disabilities, those short in stature, and those with windows in hard-to-reach locations.

How were these new standards developed? Who was involved in the process?

**WCMA:** The revised standard was updated in strict accordance with the internationally respected American National Standards Institute (ANSI) process. ANSI requirements mandate an open and balanced process with public review opportunities. The 18-month process required assembling a consensus body (the canvass group), submitting the draft standard to the canvass group for ballot and comment, addressing the comments received, re-balloting, a public review period, and then finally achieving approval of the standard.

Representatives from the window fashion industry and design community have been participants and have been notified of the standard development process. Information was provided to them to distribute to their constituents. Members from this community were also participants on the ANSI canvass body that ultimately approved the standard.

Additional notes:

- Consumers can look for the "Best for Kids" certification label to identify cordless window coverings options. WCMA created the "Best for Kids" certification program in 2015 to make it easier for consumers shopping for window coverings to identify cordless products.
- Additional information on "Best for Kids" and an FAQ on the new 2018 standards can be found at [windowcoverings.org](http://windowcoverings.org).
- The full ANSI/WCMA A100.1-2018 standard can be read online at [wcmanet.org](http://wcmanet.org). 

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