



## Bunk Bed Safety in Accommodation Facilities



### INCIDENT

One person was seriously harmed and one person died from injuries in two incidents involving bunk beds at accommodation facilities.

In the first incident, a foreign student fell out of the top bunk at the Bible College she was residing at. Her fall resulted in a broken back and paralysis from the waist down.

In the second incident, a two-year-old child was put to bed on the top bunk of a bunk bed at a residential camp. The child tried to climb down from the bunk. In doing so, his head became trapped between the top bunk guardrail and the bunk mattress, and he died from asphyxiation.

### CIRCUMSTANCES

In the first incident, the 23-year-old Canadian national had travelled to New Zealand to attend a residential bible study course. The school provided accommodation to students in the form of shared rooms with double bunk style beds.

The victim was sleeping in the top bunk. The top bunk did not have any form of guardrail or edge protection to prevent sleeping persons from falling out of bed.

In the second incident, the child was part of a young family of five that were on holiday at a residential camp. The children were aged one, two and four. The children had been put to bed; the four-year-old on the bottom bunk, the two-year-old on the top bunk, and the one-year-old in a portable cot in an upstairs bedroom of the main building.

The parents left the room to attend a meeting downstairs. From time to time they checked on the children. The parents were downstairs when the two-year-old child woke up and tried to climb off the bunk by going backwards on his stomach under the bunk's guardrail.

### INVESTIGATION

In the first incident, the investigation resulted in the Bible School ensuring that all bunk beds in use at the facility have guard rails on the top bunk that meet the requirements of AS/NZS 4220:2010: *Bunk Beds and Other Elevated Beds*.

AS/NZS 4220:2010 is the standard for bunk bed manufacturing and sets out minimum safety requirements in relation to the height of edge protection/guardrails on top bunks, stability tests and maximum heights for beds.

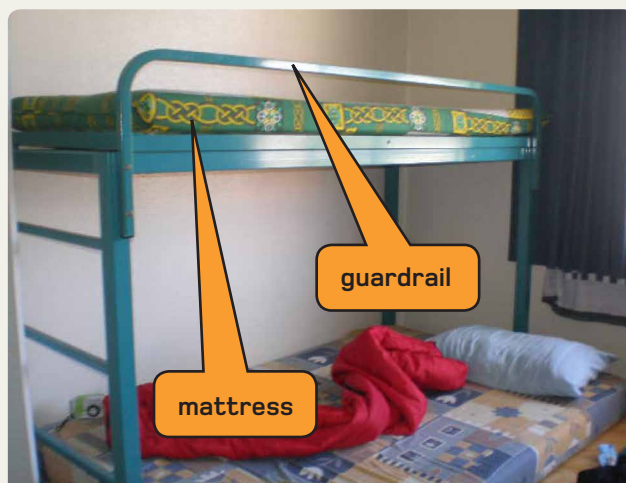
A sample audit of hostel and backpacker accommodation identified a lack of knowledge of the hazards posed by unguarded bunk beds.

In the second incident, the investigation revealed that the bunk bed also did not comply with AS/NZS 4220:2010. It was found that the vertical gap between the top of the mattress



1

Picture 1: this photo shows the unguarded bunk bed that the 23-year-old student was sleeping in at the time of the accident. None of the bunk's sides are guarded.



2

Picture 2: this photo shows the bunk bed that the toddler tried to climb out of. While one edge of the bunk is guarded, the gap between the top of the guardrail and the mattress was large enough for a child's body to wriggle through. The toddler climbed out feet first, but suffocated to death when he could not fit his head through the gap.

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and the top of the guardrail on the bunk bed did not comply with the distance recommended in the standard to prevent the risk of entrapment of a child on a bunk bed.

## DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ADVICE

It is the Department's advice that where bunk beds are used in a place of work\* that they must comply with the requirements of AS/NZS 4220:2010 *Bunk Beds and Other Elevated Beds*. This Standard is available for purchase at [www.standards.co.nz](http://www.standards.co.nz).

\*Businesses which supply accommodation need to be aware of their duties to paying clients under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 which includes taking all practicable steps to ensure that no hazard that is in the place harms people who have paid directly or indirectly to undertake an activity there.

Any bed with an upper surface of a mattress which is at least 800mm above floor height should have guard rails which form roll out protection and prevent entrapment.

Guardrails shall:

- i. have at least 360mm between the upper surface of the guard rail and the upper surface of the mattress base; or,
- ii. if the bed is marked by the manufacturer with the maximum allowable mattress height, the upper surface of the guard rail shall be at least 160mm above this mark and not less than 260mm between the upper surface of the guard and the upper surface of the mattress base.

Children under the age of 9 should not sleep in the top bunk.

## WHICH INDUSTRIES/SECTORS OR MATTERS WILL THIS INFORMATION BE RELEVANT TO?

Back packers, youth hostels, hostels, schools, Department of Conservation, residential and other camps, camping grounds, manufacturers/importers and suppliers of bunk beds, general public.

*Note: This material has been prepared using the best information available to the Department of Labour at the time of publication. Information may change over time and it may be necessary for you to obtain an update. This material is also only intended to provide general advice and does not constitute legal advice. You should make your own judgement about action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with your workplace health and safety obligations under the law.*

