Baby walkers

Key points from the European Child Safety Alliance and ANEC joint position paper

In October 2010, The European Child Safety Alliance (ECSA) and ANEC released a joint position statement about baby walkers which recommends that:

- Parents and caregivers use safer alternatives to baby walkers such as play pens and stationary activity centres
- Health care providers do not promote baby walker usage
- Health care providers educate parents at first well-baby check-up or earlier about the risks of baby walker use
- Education about baby walkers should:
  - Emphasise the risk of falls down stairs and “reaching” risks, such as when the baby pulls an appliance or hot kettle onto himself.
  - Clarify that baby walkers hinder walking ability instead of helping it.
  - Emphasise the importance of constant supervision of your child.

The European Child Safety Alliance and ANEC issued the joint statement because their research shows that:

- Babies using baby walkers are at higher risk of:
  - head injury
  - falls
  - burns
  - scalds
  - poisonings
- Baby walkers service no beneficial function for children
- Baby walkers do not help babies learn to walk – they may in fact impede walking ability rather than help it

The position statement (attached here) is supported by ECSA and ANEC country partners. This represents expert organisations (including the HSE) from over 30 EU countries coming together to state concern about the risk of severe injuries caused by the use of this non-essential product – the baby walker.

Also attached is the background paper on baby walkers presenting evidence collected by the European Child Safety Alliance and ANEC, for instance:

- Falls down stairs in baby walkers are a leading cause of head injuries to children.
- Burns and scalds account for approximately 5% of baby walker injuries. These injuries tend to be the most severe of all baby walker injuries, accounting for over 40% of baby walker injuries requiring hospitalisation.
- A study in Australia found baby walkers to be the second most common factor in infant poisonings.
- Careful supervision on its own is not likely to reduce the risk of injury. This is because a child in a baby walker can reach speeds of 1 metre per second! This is much faster than an adult can react to prevent the injury. In fact, in over 75% of injuries, adults witnessed the injury and could not prevent it.

More detailed information on injuries associated with baby walker use is available on www.childsafetyeurope.org and www.anec.eu

Information from:
European Child Safety Alliance and ANEC. European Child Safety Alliance and ANEC joint position statement: Baby walkers. October 2010
European Child Safety Alliance and ANEC. Background paper: Baby walkers. October 2010