

Product Safety Framework (PSF)

The Product Safety Framework (PSF) is a revolutionary idea, developed by Standards Australia, project managed by StanCert and carried out in collaboration with the Infant and Nursery Products Association of Australia (INPAA), the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), CHOICE (previously known as the Australian Consumers Association) and other key consumer and industry stakeholders.

The PSF has been developed as a handbook, a lower level consensus document that allows the community to use it, test its effectiveness and identify gaps and deficiencies. The PSF is an innovative risk-based methodology that deals with specific safety hazards rather than specific products.

Designed to enhance the safe supply, sale and use of products, the PSF is a horizontal approach that:

- identifies hazards using a risk assessment process;
- proves/disproves the hazard's existence using a series of modular hazard tests;
- mitigates proven standards through design, protective equipment or education/warnings;
- complements and leverages proven standards throughout the supply chain to ultimately deliver safe products to consumers;
- can potentially apply to all products;
- is modular and therefore fast and easy to update; and
- provides a verification process that allows for validation.

The PSF has six parts:

Part 1: Application Guide

Part 2: Hazard Checklist

Part 3: Generic requirement modules

Part 4: Specific product guidelines

Part 5: Information guides

Part 6: Vertical application guides

The development of the PSF is in response to the review by the Productivity Commission of the Australian Consumer Product Safety System, published on 16 January 2006.

Recommendation 12.1 in the review report stated:

All mandatory safety hazards for consumer products should be developed on a "hazard" focused basis. Regulations should ensure such standards only address essential safety issues and leave other design issues for voluntary standards. Further, wherever appropriate, regulations should adopt international standards.

The Productivity Commission also recommended (12.2):

The Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs, through the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, should work with Standards Australia with a view to significantly streamlining the standards-making process to improve timelines, given the potential impacts of standards in rapidly changing market place. The aim should be for mandatory safety standards to be developed and implemented within 12 months.

Traditionally safety standards have been developed for specific products as they have come on the market. Using the PSF approach Standards Australia is able to identify some of the possible hazards that could be built into nursery products and put guidelines in place to deal with them. The PSF deals with specific dangers such as flammability, chemical and biological hazards, children getting their heads or hands trapped, latches on sliding gates and harnessing systems.

There are a number of reasons why the PSF is an important development. Apart from being innovative and ground-breaking, it provides a viable alternative, building on the high quality work already produced in Australian Standards. It is important to acknowledge that there are existing standards in this area. Existing standards and regulatory frameworks can however only cover a very small proportion of consumer products that are out there in the market.

The process to develop a standard is difficult, particularly in this area: it requires a significant amount of negotiation, it is time consuming and understandably it deals with a very emotive issue. New products come onto the market at an increasingly rapid rate and there are a range of distributors and a wide variety of products. The strength of the PSF is that it allows us to leverage off the existing Standards, complement them by using a risk-based modular process and do this within a shorter time frame.