Crib maker alters design to prevent infant deaths

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

A crib manufacturer is making design changes so its product can not be incorrectly assembled — as happened in White Lake which may have contributed to the death of an 8-month-old boy.

Cosco, Inc., of Columbus, In., will design its cribs so the bottom and side panels can no longer be interchanged, as happened in the household of Brandon Shirley, who died June 23.

"The changes will go into production next week," Carol Dingledy, manager of corporate communications, said Friday.

Earlier in the week, the company and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission issued a warning that any number of the 390,000 full size cribs manufactured after January 1995, may have been "misassembled," resulting injury or death.

The company said it had received more than 47 reports of cribs being "mis-assembled," including 27 reports of babies becoming entrapped.

The company spokesman did not go into detail about the design changes. But she said the changes will make it impossible for customers to interchange the mattress platform with a side panel.

An incorrectly assembled crib was largely responsible in death of Brandon Shirley, according to White Lake police. The baby either slid or wiggled between the crib's bars and strangled when its head was caught, according to Det. Jon Kirken.

If the crib had been assembled correctly, the baby's body could not have fit between the bars of the crib side panels, said Kirken. But with the mattress platform — with wider spacing — used as a side panel, the baby's body was able to fit between the bars leading to tragedy, he said.

Federal regulations specify the spacing between bars on crib side panels, according to Kenneth P. Giles, spokesman for the product safety commission. But there are no such regulations on the mattress platforms, he said.

"Misassembling that crib is a very easy mistake to make," said Geoffrey N. Fieger the Southfield attorney representing the baby's mother, Shannon Shirley. "We found retail stores that displayed the crib with the bottom interchanged with the side."

Fieger said the suit on behalf of the baby's mother was to be filed Friday or early next week. When his client purchased the crib, "it didn't even have a warning," said the attorney.

The company started issuing warnings with its cribs last year, said Dingledy, "and that seemed to help."

Dingledy said she had no way of determining where the idea of the design changes came from. One of those who recommended such changes to the product safety commission was Oakland County Medical Examiner Ljubisa J. Dragovic.

After the autopsy of Brandon Shirley, Dragovic said cribs could be designed so they could not be assembled incorrectly. The manufacturers of infant car seats had voluntarily made such design changes, he said.

County parks focus of contest

Pack a camera for visits to the 11 Oakland County Parks this summer to photograph Michigan's natural beauty and its residents at play.

Amateur photographers can enter photos focusing on landscapes, nature, visual or performing arts and recreation in the 1997 "Focus on Michigan" Photography Contest.

To be eligible, photographs must be taken at a public park, recreation facility, public festival or fair. Only original 35 mm color prints will be accepted; minimum size 3" x 5" and maximum size 4" x 6".

Three photographs may be entered in one age division: Youth (17 and under), Adult (18-54) and Senior (55 and older). Entry deadline is Sept. 15, 1997.

Entries will be judged on content, composition and technical merit. Local winners will be selected by a panel of judges from Oakland County Parks.

The top three photographs from each division will advance to the state competition. Winning photographs will be displayed at Michigan Recreation and Park Association's annual winter conference. The 1997 "Focus on Michigan" Photography Contest is sponsored by Oakland County Parks and MRPA. One photo will be selected at the state competition as "Best of Show" and awarded $100.

The 11 Oakland County Parks are Addison Oaks near Oxford; Glen Oaks Golf Course in Farmington Hills; Groveland Oaks near Holly; Independence Oaks near Clarkston; Lyon Oaks in Lyon Township; Orion Oaks in Orion Township; Red Oaks Golf Course, Waterpark and Sports Village in Madison Heights; Rose Oaks in Rose Township; Springfield Oaks Activity Center and Golf Course in Davisburg; Waterford Oaks in Waterford; and White Lake Oaks Golf Course in White Lake.

To obtain an entry form and general information sheet, entries should be mailed to Oakland County Parks, 2800 Watkins Lake Road, Waterford Michigan 48328, Attn: Jill Elliott and post marked by Sept. 15, 1997 or call (248) 858-1086, or TDD: (248) 858-1684.

Information on the Oakland County Parks is now available on the website www.co.oakland.mi.us.

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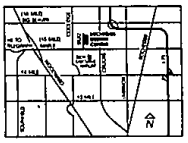

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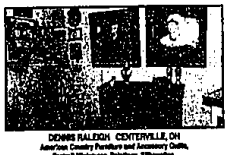

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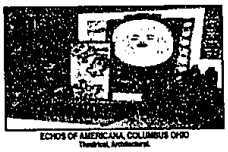

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