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School student injured by storage box lid

In March 2019, a young school student was injured when their head became trapped between two adjacent lids on a storage box in a playground. Each of the box's heavy timber lids opened and closed independently and were supported by gas struts. The student put their head between a fully-opened lid and a partially-opened lid that was opening, trapping their head.

It also appears a worker, who attempted to release the student, has possibly sustained injuries due to the pressure applied by the gas struts.

Investigations are continuing.

Preventing a similar incident

Storage boxes are common and those with larger or heavier lids are often supported by gas struts. Gas struts are used to give mechanical assistance to lifting and supporting components such as tool box lids, car bonnets, rear doors, storage boxes and camping trailer hatches.

Higher order risk controls include ensuring designers, manufacturers, importers and suppliers fulfil their duties, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that fixtures, fittings or plant are without risks to the health and safety of persons. Designers also have a duty to provide specific information to the manufacturer and must also carry out, or arrange the carrying out of, any calculations, analysis, testing or examination that may be necessary to ensure the plant is safe and without risks to health and safety.

Designers, manufacturers, importers and suppliers of storage boxes all have duties to provide information that enables other duty holders to fulfil the responsibilities they have in managing the risks associated with using storage boxes.

Gas struts may reduce certain risks, such as reducing the amount of manual force required to open lids and prevent them from inadvertently lowering. However, the risk of pinching, crushing or shearing injuries from movement between the parts of the equipment may remain. In some instances, adding a gas strut may introduce new risks including:

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- Additional areas where people can place body parts and get injured by the movement of the gas strut and associated equipment.
- Incorrect selection or installation of gas struts may lead to either:
 - too little force to properly assist in operating and maintaining the equipment in the desired position, or
 - too much force which, for example, may make closing a lid far more difficult than opening it.

PCBUs should take practical steps to address any potential hazards to ensure the safety of anyone using similar types of storage boxes and others who may be able to access the equipment. These steps include the need to risk assess the equipment to ensure:

- The equipment is suitable for the task and the environment in which it is located
- People who operate the equipment can do so safely
- People who are not allowed to operate the equipment (e.g. children) should be prevented from accessing (e.g. playing with, or operating) the equipment
- If people not allowed to operate the equipment can access it, the equipment should be locked to ensure it can only be operated by authorised people
- Whether additional controls, such as locking gas struts or additional propping may be required for people who operate the equipment
- The equipment is well-designed and continues to be well-maintained and operated safely.

When a PCBU decides to purchase a storage box or similar equipment, they need to consider the warning information from the importer or supplier and note any limitations of use of the equipment. They must review the available information to ensure the equipment is suitable for the intended use and monitor and review whether the controls in place continue to be suitable.

Statistics

Since 2013, each year on average, there have been over 2,000 accepted workers' compensation claims for injuries where workers have been trapped between stationary and moving objects. The education and training sector accounts for three per cent of these claims each year.

In the same period, we have been notified of 995 incidents involving people being injured or at risk of serious injury by being trapped between stationary and moving objects. Six of these incidents related to gas struts and/or storage boxes and we have issued six statutory notices across all industries.

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