



# Safety Notice

SN:004/07

28 March 2007

## Shower Curtain and Curtain Tracks in Mental Health Facilities

### Distributed to:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Directors of Clinical Operations
- Area Directors of Mental Health

### Action required by:

- Area Directors of Mental Health

### For response by:

No response to Quality and Safety Branch required

### We recommend you also inform:

- Asset Managers
- Mental Health Inpatient Facilities
- D&A Inpatient Facilities
- Drug and Alcohol Services
- Area Directors of Nursing
- Mental Health Unit NUMs

### Deadline for completion of action

**Not applicable**

### Quality and Safety Branch

NSW Department of Health  
Tel. 02 9391 9200  
Fax. 02 9391 9556  
Email  
[quality@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:quality@doh.health.nsw.gov.au)

### Background

There is general consensus that mental health services have a particular responsibility to prevent suicide among people who have been admitted to hospital. The risk of suicide is often a factor in the admission of patients to an acute psychiatric unit and a reason for detaining patients under the Mental Health Act 1990 (NSW).

In 2004, the most frequent method of suicide was hanging, comprising almost half of all suicide deaths (Australian Bureau of Statistics – Suicides, Australia 1994 to 2004).

Recently in NSW, a near miss involved an incident where the shower curtain did not “collapse”. The installed shower curtain became a “fixture” instead of a collapsible fitting as required by the NSW Health Facility Guidelines (HFG).

The installed shower curtain system was a fixture that relied on a shower curtain attachment designed to release at a low breaking strain from the fixed (non-collapsible) shower curtain track. However, when all the curtain attachments were bunched together, the capacity of the shower curtain to collapse was significantly reduced.

HFG have been used in NSW since the early 1970s for new and refurbished facilities. The shower curtain, other curtains, and the tracks in mental health units should comply with the HFG current at the time of planning approval or subsequent phases of planning or refurbishment of mental health units.

Subsequent HFG have stressed the importance of safety and collapsible fittings, eg. “finishes, fixtures and fittings must be carefully specified so that the patient is given no opportunity for self harm”.

The current HFG are the 2006/07 **Australasian Health Facility Guidelines (AUS HFG)**, adapted from the NSW HFG and approved for use in NSW by the Director-General in December 2006. The AUS HFG can be found at <http://www.healthfacilityguidelines.com.au/>.

The AUS HFG refer to policy and standards for NSW public healthcare facilities, including mental health facilities. The AUS HFG will undergo a continuous review process, and amendments will be made from time to time and documented in accordance with the version control processes for amendments.

### Suggested Action by Area Health Services

- Ensure that all existing shower curtain and curtain tracks in mental health units have been checked to ensure that they comply with the NSW Health Facility Guidelines. If shower curtain and curtain tracks are to be replaced or repaired, they should comply with the current Australasian Health Facility Guidelines.