Overview

Toxic chemicals known to cause cancer and other health effects are prevalent as flame retardants in standard household items like couches and carpet, as well as in firefighter uniforms. In past decades, many states mandated that manufacturers incorporate these chemicals into consumer products. These policies were enacted before scientists were able to determine the effects of these chemicals on health, and often with the strong support of the chemical and tobacco industries. Today, new research has called into question both the effectiveness of these chemicals--such as chlorinated tris and polybrominated diphenyl (PBDE)--and the associated health risk to consumers and firefighters.

Legislation

- California A.B. 2998 (2018) set a national precedent. It bans all toxic flame retardants in children's products, mattresses, and furniture.

- Rhode Island H. 5082 (2017) bans organohalogens, a flame retardant chemical, in upholstered furniture and bedding products.

- Maine H.P. 138 (2017) prohibits the sale and distribution of upholstered furniture containing a certain percentage of flame-retardants.

- A comprehensive list of legislation regarding flame retardants is available through Safer States.

KEY POINTS

→ Children can have up to five times higher levels of flame retardant chemicals in their bodies than their mothers, increasing the risk of learning disabilities and developmental impairment. (Environmental Working Group)

→ Flame retardants put firefighters at higher risk for certain cancers, including 62% higher rates of esophageal cancer than the general public. (Marine & Environmental Research Institute)

→ Safer alternatives exist that still meet fire safety standards. You can find out more about specific alternatives here: http://www.epa.gov/dfe/pubs/flameret/ffr-alt.htm

9 current policies in 7 states
48 adopted policies in 16 states

Current Policies   Adopted Policies   Both

Other Resources

- Toxic-Free Future flame retardants in home furniture research findings.
- Alaska Community Action on Toxics science fact sheet.
- Minnseota Professional Firefighters info sheet.

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