

The Alliance for **FLAME RETARDANT FREE FURNITURE**

Policy paper **Safe fire safety for everyone** **Avoid toxic flame retardants in our furniture**

Flame retardants in my furniture? Why?

Many fire safety standards exist in the EU Member States, as part of more general product safety efforts. As a result, furniture and bedding manufacturers often need to use materials like foam or textiles treated with (or containing) flame retardants to comply with old fashioned fire safety standards. However, these substances are not proven to prevent fire and are usually toxic to humans, animals and the environment.

Are all flame retardants safe? No, but why?

Many flame retardants have been documented to have harmful effects and can be dangerous for human health, animals and the environment, yet their usage is still very common. They are frequently found in homes, schools, hospitals, cars and workplaces, in furniture, as well as in many other common items such as clothing and electronics. Alarmingly, toddlers and children are at the highest risk as they crawl around and put objects in their mouths, exposing themselves to substances in the surrounding environment. Workers are exposed when manufacturing or handling products that contain flame retardants. During a fire, citizens and fire-fighters suffer from exposure to potent toxic fumes released from the combustion of materials containing these toxic chemicals. This is called fire toxicity and is increasingly the cause of deaths in fires. Fire-fighters also often suffer higher levels of cancer than other worker groups because of their regular exposure to toxic smoke.

Why are flame retardants still used? Are they effective?

Flame retardants are a historical, hazardous and ineffective solution to fire safety. In fact, they do not prevent fires, they only delay them by a few seconds in some cases¹, at the cost of an increase in fire toxicity, further endangering people's lives and health. Many fire safety standards have led to an unnecessary use of flame retardants. Changes in key standards² have resulted in less exposure to these substances without increases in fires.

¹ Crib 5 Test (Fire standard BS5852 1982, Part 2)

² California TB 133 - Flammability Test Procedure for Seating Furniture for Use in Public Occupancies

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Are there alternatives to flame retardants? Yes

There are many alternatives that do not require the use of flame retardants in furniture:

- Design-based solutions for furniture and buildings: Material and structural
- Smoke detectors & automatic sprinklers in buildings
- Regular testing of electrical and gas installations
- Self-extinguishing ignitors (e.g. cigarettes and candles)
- Improved fire safety education (including behavioural education related to smoking) and prevention, as well as evacuation plans and fire exits

What is industry doing and how can authorities help?

The furniture industry, among others, is trying to evolve and eliminate toxic flame retardants and is ready to look into developing and preparing alternative solutions, but requires the support of policymakers to achieve this goal. In the short term, measures such as the use of interliners are envisaged as one solution. For a long-term sustainable approach, new materials which are much less flammable and 'fire toxic' than those currently used will need to be market ready. In the meanwhile, EU-wide action against the use of flame retardants is needed. Improving fire-test standards including fire toxicity, which are often ineffective and far from reality, is a top priority. Moreover, efficacy and safety of chemicals should be evaluated throughout the whole lifecycle of products, from the crucial design phase to the end-of-life.

Safe Fire Safety supporting the Circular Economy

The removal of toxic substances not only helps support a cleaner and more efficient circular economy by allowing increasing the quality and durability of furniture materials and by enabling more material to be safely reused or recycled, but also enhances the competitiveness of the furniture industry. EU legislation from 2019 on electronic displays under the Ecodesign Directive supported this approach, which provided clarity/certainty and would be welcomed in the furniture sector.



Join the Alliance for Flame Retardants Free Furniture: <https://safefurniture.eu/>

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