



Consumer Federation of America

For Immediate Release
March 31, 2015

Contact: Rachel Weintraub, CFA (202) 387-6121
Alyssa Ritterstein, Earthjustice (202) 797-5243

HEALTH, FIREFIGHTER, CONSUMER AND SCIENCE GROUPS SEEK BAN ON HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS WITH TOXIC CHEMICAL FLAME RETARDANTS

97% of U.S. residents at risk from toxic organohalogen flame retardants in their bodies

Washington, D.C. — Today, a broad coalition of health, firefighter, consumer and science groups filed a [petition](#) asking the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to ban four categories of consumer products — children’s products, furniture, mattresses and the casings around electronics — if they contain any flame retardant in the chemical class known as organohalogens. Petitioners include the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Hispanic Medical Association, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the Learning Disabilities Association of America, Consumers Union, Consumer Federation of America, the League of United Latin American Citizens, Worksafe, Dr. Philip J. Landrigan and the Green Science Policy Institute.

This entire class of chemicals has been associated with serious human health problems, including cancer, reduced sperm count, increased time to pregnancy, decreased IQ in children, impaired memory, learning deficits, hyperactivity, hormone disruption and lowered immunity. Nevertheless, the chemicals continue to be used at high levels in consumer products.

These chemicals migrate continuously out from everyday household products into the air and dust, such as when a guest sits on a sofa or a baby is laid down on a crib’s mattress. As a result, more than 97 percent of U.S. residents have measurable quantities of toxic organohalogen flame retardants in their blood. Children are especially at-risk because they come into greater contact with household dust than adults. Studies show that children, whose developing brains and reproductive organs are most vulnerable, have three to five times higher levels than their parents.

A growing number of firefighter organizations have expressed concern about the use of this class of chemicals as well. When consumer products containing these chemicals burn, the fire and smoke become more toxic. The International Association of Fire Fighters has determined that there is a link between exposure to the fumes created when toxins burn and the disproportionately high levels of cancer among firefighters.

No law or government regulation in the country compels the use of flame retardants in the products that are the subject of this petition. However, no law or regulation prohibits using chemicals from this toxic class in consumer products either. Over the last decade, as evidence mounts that one flame retardant chemical is dangerous, the chemical industry has responded by phasing it out and replacing it with a structurally similar chemical that eventually also turns out to be harmful.

The most effective solution is to ban products containing this entire class of chemicals. Under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act, the CPSC has this authority.

Quote Sheet

Statement from Sandra G. Hassink, MD, President, American Academy of Pediatrics:

“In order to grow and thrive, every child needs a safe and healthy environment. One growing threat to child health and safety is toxic flame retardant chemicals found in many common household and children’s products. The American Academy of Pediatrics has joined this petition to urge the CPSC to help protect children from the health and developmental effects of these damaging chemicals, which are especially harmful during critical windows of development for their growing minds and bodies. Children’s natural behaviors – playing on the floor, exploring different surfaces, putting things in their mouths – make them uniquely vulnerable to flame retardants and the harmful fumes and dust they emit. These products must be made safer if we are to make children’s environments safer and secure the foundations of health for every child.”

Statement from Farzanna S. Haffizulla, MD, President, American Medical Women’s Association:

“Organohalogen flame retardants are global contaminants that must be banned to further protect the health of people and the environment worldwide. Health care professionals are encouraged to incorporate an environmental exposure history from their patients in order to make a comprehensive list of recommendations for their overall health and safety.”

Statement from Urvashi Rangan, Ph.D., Director, Consumer Safety and Sustainability, Consumer Reports:

"Consumers rightly expect the furniture and children’s products in their homes to meet flammability standards – but not at the expense of being exposed to toxic chemicals. CPSC should ban products with these hazardous flame retardants, and encourage manufacturers to use smolder-resistant fabrics and fire-resistant barrier materials instead."

Statement from Rachel Weintraub, Legislative Director and General Counsel, Consumer Federation of America, Co-counsel on this Petition:

“We urge the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to grant this petition and take steps to ensure that consumer products such as children’s products, furniture, mattresses and parts of electronics do not contain a class of flame retardants, organohalogens, that have been associated with numerous and serious health problems. The vast majority of consumers are unwittingly exposing their children and their families to increased risks when they purchase and use these products.”

Statement from Arlene Blum, Founder and Executive Director of the Green Science Policy Institute:

"It’s time to stop moving from one harmful flame retardant to its chemical cousin. By phasing out the entire class of organohalogen flame retardants, we can have healthier consumer products.”

Statement from Harold Schaitberger, General President, International Association of Fire Fighters:

“When toxic flame retardants burn - and they do burn - it creates a serious health risk for fire fighters. There is significant scientific data that shows the association between firefighting,

exposure to deadly toxins and cancer. That's why the IAFF is committed to finding solutions to provide toxic free fire safety."

Statement from Nancy Cowles, Executive Director, Kids in Danger:

"Hidden chemicals in products for babies and children is a hazard no parent can protect their child from without help from regulators. We strongly support removing this class of flame retardants from children's products."

Statement from Brent Wilkes, Executive Director, League of United Latin American Citizens:

"It's critical that the Latino community understand the health risks associated with toxic exposure to dangerous chemicals in consumer products. LULAC joins this petition as part of our ongoing effort to raise awareness about environmental health issues that disproportionately impact Latinos at home, in the workplace and beyond."

Statement from Nancie Payne, President, Learning Disabilities Association of America:

"Recent scientific studies show that children more highly exposed to flame retardant chemicals in the womb have lower IQs and problems with learning and behavior. These problems are lasting, and affect children's ability to achieve their full potential in school and in life. The science is in on this class of flame retardant chemicals; they harm brain development, and have no business being in consumer goods."

Statement from Dr. Elena Rios, MD, MSPH, President & CEO, National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA):

"Unhealthy environments lead to unhealthy lives. Studies show that children from communities of color have significantly higher body burdens of flame retardant chemicals. As an organization committed to improving the health of Hispanic and other underserved populations, it is critical that we address toxic exposure that threatens the wellbeing of our children and undermines their future."

Statement from Gail Bateson, Executive Director, Worksafe:

"This petition to the CPSC is of critical importance to people who are disproportionately exposed to flame retardants: the large groups of working people who are exposed both on the job as well as when in their homes. The impact on fire fighters has received a lot of well-deserved attention based on their exposure to toxic fumes released by these products when they burn. But workers involved in manufacturing or building homes using products containing flame retardants are largely being kept in the dark about their exposures. It's time to move to safer, less toxic ways to protect all of us from fires."

Statement from Eve Gartner, Earthjustice, Co-counsel on this Petition:

"When pediatricians, firefighters, scientists, advocates for children with learning disabilities, advocates for disproportionately affected Latino communities and the most respected consumer advocates in the country come together to sound the alarm about toxic flame retardants in household products, the Consumer Product Safety Commission should take notice – and take action. Ridding these toxics from the many products we use everyday would improve the health of most people in the United States, and especially children."