

Toxic Flame Retardants Unnecessary in Upholstered Furniture

By Brad Miller - February 4, 2020

Maryland has good reasons for protecting the health of its residents and environment by banning toxic flame retardants that have historically been required in many products in the name of fire safety. We now know these requirements have led to growing health concerns for consumers and firefighters doing their job.

The legislation sponsored by Senator Guy Guzzone and Delegate Bonnie Cullison could save lives, protect workers, preserve the environment, and improve fire safety by prohibiting the sale of children's products, mattresses, and upholstered furniture that contain toxic flame retardants.

For decades, flame retardants have been used in everything from furniture to children's products, driven by regulations that haven't actually done much to protect consumers. These [toxic chemicals](#) have been linked to cancer, thyroid disruption, memory and learning problems, delayed mental and physical development, and reduced fertility. They migrate into household dust that gets ingested and inhaled by humans and pets. As a result, they are now ubiquitous in our households and workplaces and have steadily built up in the environment and in humans.

Infants and firefighters face especially high exposure risks. Children are particularly vulnerable because their brains and reproductive organs are still developing. They come into greater contact with household dust than adults from crawling on the floor and frequently putting their hands in their mouths. Firefighters also face especially high exposure to toxic flame retardants because they are used in many products that, when burned in fires, become even more toxic. Firefighters are rightfully concerned because they face higher levels of cancer compared to the general population.

Flame retardants are also ineffective in furniture. According to research by the Green Science Policy Institute and others, these chemicals provide no meaningful fire safety benefit. The furniture industry has been at the forefront of efforts to change the regulations and get hazardous flame retardants out of furniture, working with public health and consumer groups in California and elsewhere to ensure that flame retardants are no longer required in furniture. Our efforts are working as the vast majority of furniture in the United States today does not contain flame retardant chemicals. The remaining uses can and should be ended.

Maryland and other states have taken previous steps to ban individual flame retardants, but use has shifted to other chemicals. The legislation being considered would eliminate all forms of needless chemicals. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of upholstered furniture is already produced without toxic flame retardants and moving to 100 percent is well within reach. [California](#) has successfully banned these chemicals and we encourage your state to adopt that model. This legislation would make businesses, consumers and firefighters safer throughout Maryland and replicating the California requirements will make the transition for all manufacturers much easier and quicker. We urge the General Assembly and Governor Hogan to act without delay.

Brad Miller is the Director of Advocacy & Sustainability for [BIFMA](#), the non-profit trade association for business and institutional furniture manufacturers. Phone: 616-591-9797 / email: bmiller@bifma.org