



Learn more about flame retardant chemicals and how to reduce exposure to them in child care settings.

What are flame retardant chemicals?

Flame retardant chemicals are intended to help slow the spread of fire. Since the 1970s, they have been added to certain products as an inexpensive way to comply with outdated fire safety standards. However, studies have shown that they are not necessary to prevent the spread of fire. In fact, if a fire does break out in a building with many flame retardant-treated products, the fire becomes more deadly because of the release of harmful gases and soot.

Where are flame retardant chemicals found?

These chemicals can be found in upholstered furniture, carpet padding, building insulation, electronics and other products. In children's products, they can be found in items with foam padding, such as bouncy chairs, nap mats, infant carriers, bassinets, and others. In the 1960s and 70s they were added to children's pajamas, though this is no longer a common practice.

Are flame retardants harmful?

Flame retardants are accumulating in humans and the environment. They have been linked to a variety of health concerns such as hormonal disruption, reduced IQ levels, increased hyperactivity in children, obesity, reduced sperm quality, infertility, and cancer.

Is furniture without chemical flame retardants less safe?

All furniture sold in California must meet a flammability standard. Manufacturers previously used flame retardants to meet the standard, but now choose materials that are inherently less flammable, such as polyester and wool, to meet the fire safety standard.

How are we exposed to flame retardant chemicals?

Flame retardants can migrate out of household products and stick to dust that then settles on surfaces. When we touch those surfaces, the chemicals are transferred to our hands and we can ingest them when we eat. Toddlers have much higher levels of flame retardants in their blood because of their normal hand-to-mouth behavior.

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How do I know if there are flame retardant chemicals in my furniture and children's products?

As of January 1, 2020, flame retardant chemicals are banned from upholstered furniture and most children's products sold in California. Many manufacturers began phasing them out as early as 2014 for all of the US market. However, it's always a good idea to check, especially when buying something second-hand.

For upholstered furniture sold after 2015, you can look for the TB 117-2013 label here, typically located underneath the product or where the cushions meet the seat back.

Unfortunately, children's products are not required to carry a label that discloses flame retardant use. Some manufacturers will indicate this on the product description online or on the product package. If you can't find this information, you can call the manufacturer and ask.

How can I avoid flame retardants when buying children's pajamas?

Choose snug-fitting cotton pajamas with the yellow tag pictured below. Pajamas for children over the age of 9 months are required to meet a flammability test or be snug-fitting. A garment worn close to the skin is less likely to catch fire, so manufacturers can avoid using flame retardant chemicals if the pajamas are snug.



How can I reduce exposure to flame retardant chemicals?

- Dust, mop, and vacuum with a HEPA filter often.
- Encourage caregivers and children to wash their hands often, especially before eating.
- Avoid eating while using electronics. Don't allow children to put electronic devices into their mouths.
- Cover up holes or reupholster old furniture, pillows, or pads if foam cushions are exposed.
- Consider replacing the foam in furniture with flame retardant-free foam.

Learn more at SFEnvironment.org/frordinance or call (415) 355-3700.

NOTICE

THIS ARTICLE MEETS THE FLAMMABILITY REQUIREMENTS OF CALIFORNIA BUREAU OF ELECTRONIC AND APPLIANCE REPAIR, HOME FURNISHINGS AND THERMAL INSULATION TECHNICAL BULLETIN 117-2013. CARE SHOULD BE EXERCISED NEAR OPEN FLAME OR WITH BURNING CIGARETTES.

The upholstery materials in this product:
 contain added flame retardant chemicals
 contain NO added flame retardant chemicals

The State of California has updated the flammability standard and determined that the fire safety requirements for this product can be met without adding flame retardant chemicals. The State has identified many flame retardant chemicals as being known to, or strongly suspected of, adversely impacting human health or development.

