

Q. & A. Consumer Fact Sheet on Flame Retardants

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Q1. What is a flame retardant and why are they used in furniture and building materials?

In response to some state and federal flammability requirements, companies have used a range of flame retardant chemicals in products to decrease the ignitability of materials and inhibit the combustion process.

Q2. Where are flame retardant chemicals found?

Flame retardants are found in a range of plastic, textile and foam products. Some examples are electronics, appliances, furniture, automotive and aviation components, wire and cable, carpets, and building materials such as insulation and roofing. Flame retardant chemicals may be released from these articles.

Q3. What are the potential risks from flame retardant chemicals?

Test data and monitoring studies in humans and the environment have demonstrated that certain flame retardant chemicals can persist in the environment, bioaccumulate in people and animals, and have been shown to cause adverse developmental effects in animals.

Q4. What has EPA already done about flame retardants? Are there existing restrictions on certain flame retardants?

The EPA has taken a range of regulatory actions on flame retardant chemicals in both our new and existing chemicals programs under TSCA. EPA also helped to facilitate

voluntary commitments to cease production of some of these chemicals. For example:

- In 2004, the only U.S. manufacturer of pentaBDE and octaBDE, completed a voluntary phase-out of the chemicals. (Link: <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/existingchemicals/pubs/qanda.html>)
- In 2009, the principal decaBDE manufacturers and importers committed to end production, importation, and sales of decaBDE for most uses in the United States by December 31, 2012, and for all uses by the end of 2013. (Link: <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/existingchemicals/pubs/actionplans/deccadbe.html>)
- In 2012, EPA issued a proposed rule that aims, in part, to stop the potential importation of products containing PBDEs. Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) include the commercial versions of pentabromodiphenyl ether (c-pentaBDE), octabromodiphenyl ether (c-octaBDE), and decabromodiphenyl ether (c-decaBDE). (Link: <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/existingchemicals/pubs/actionplans/EPA-HQ-OPPT-2010-1039-0001.pdf>)
- In the Spring of 2013, EPA outlined a strategy for assessing more than 20 flame retardant chemicals to identify potential concerns and consider action, as appropriate, if risks are identified (Link: http://www.epa.gov/oppt/existingchemicals/pubs/assessment_chemicals_list.html)
- EPA is also working with stakeholders through the Design for the Environment (DfE) Alternatives Assessment effort to identify safer alternatives to PBDEs, HBCD, and a number of other flame retardant chemicals. (Link: http://www.epa.gov/dfе/alternative_assessments.html)

Q5. Although production of pentaBDE ceased in 2004, is it still being used in consumer products?

It is possible that pentaBDE is being used in other countries and entering the United States in imported articles. As noted above, in 2012, as part of the Agency's ongoing efforts to reduce exposure to these chemicals, EPA issued a proposed rule that will require manufacturers, importers, and processors of PBDEs to submit information for review to the EPA before initiating any new uses or imports of PBDEs.

Q6. How do I know if flame retardants are in my furniture and should I consider discarding any products that might contain them?

Since many manufacturers have used flame retardants to meet flammability standards, it is likely that furniture and other products may contain some of these chemicals.

When purchasing new furniture, consumers may want to ask whether the product contains flame retardant chemicals. The Agency is not recommending that consumers discard any products that might contain flame retardants.

As part of the Agency's ongoing strategy to more fully understand the potential health

and environmental concerns posed by these chemicals, EPA is currently assessing more than 20 flame retardants to determine if they pose a risk and, if so, will identify specific actions to identify those risks. EPA believes that industry's voluntary phase-out of several PBDEs and additional actions the Agency has already taken are useful steps to minimize and ultimately help prevent further exposure to these chemicals.

(<http://www.epa.gov/oppt/existingchemicals/pubs/actionplans/EPA-HQ-OPPT-2010-1039-0001.pdf>)

Q7. How can I reduce my family's exposure to flame retardant chemicals?

Cleaning with a damp mop or the use of High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuums can help reduce the amount of dust in your home that may contain flame retardants.