

TOXIC HOT SEAT Q&A

<http://www.toxichotseatmovie.com/>

Why has upholstered furniture been treated with flame retardants?

A California furniture flammability standard called Technical Bulletin 117 (TB117) led to the use of harmful and ineffective flame retardant chemicals in upholstered furniture and baby product foam across the US and Canada from 1975 to the present.

This standard only tests product filling material and does not address the fabric covering where fires start, nor does it address the leading cause of furniture fires: cigarettes. TB117 has been updated and is being replaced by TB117-2013, which stops cigarette fires where they start, on the fabric. The new standard provides increased fire safety without the use of flame retardants.

How can I buy furniture without flame retardants?

Manufacturers can begin to make flame retardant-free furniture under the new regulation, TB117-2013, beginning January 2014.

Although the new standard can be met without flame retardants, it does NOT ban their use. Look for the TB117-2013 label on products, and then verify with your retailer or manufacturer that products do not contain flame retardants.

What are the health concerns associated with flame retardants in furniture?

Flame retardant chemicals have been associated with a host of human health concerns, including lower birth weight, reduced IQ (similar to lead poisoning), hyperactivity, poorer coordination, reduced fertility, birth defects, hormonal changes, and cancer.

Is there scientific research to back up the information about health problems?

To date, there have been over 4,000 studies on PBDEs alone and the literature continues to grow. The Green Science Policy Institute compiled a bibliography with hundreds of references regarding the negative health impacts of flame retardants used in furniture which is available [here](#).

How do I know if my old couch or other furniture contains flame retardants?

If your furniture contains polyurethane foam and has a label stating that it meets California Technical Bulletin 117 (TB117), then it almost certainly does contain flame retardant chemicals. Unfortunately, even if furniture does not have a TB117 label, if it contains polyurethane foam, it could still contain flame retardants. Since there are no laws that require manufacturers to provide this information to consumers, the only way to know for sure is to test the foam by analytical chemistry methods.

Can I get my product with foam tested?

Testing for all types of flame retardants is not readily available to consumers as far as we know.

There is one service for consumers we are aware of that can test foam samples for brominated flame retardants (like PBDEs):

<http://berkeleypurehome.myshopify.com/>

Note that this service does not test for all kinds of flame retardants, only brominated. Chlorinated and phosphate flame retardants are also of concern.

What can I do to reduce my family's exposure to flame retardants?

The best way to reduce exposure to flame retardants is to remove products containing them from your indoor environments.

The next best strategy is to keep household dust levels down. Most exposure to flame retardants occurs after the chemicals migrate out of a product's foam and settle into household dust, which then enter our bodies by hand-to-mouth contact. Vacuuming frequently with a HEPA filter, wet mopping, and dusting with a damp cloth can reduce household dust. Finally, washing your and your children's hands frequently, and always before eating, can help reduce ingestion of dust containing flame retardants. Visit our [Consumer Resources page](#) to learn more.

Do slipcovers help prevent flame retardants from leaving the foam?

Unfortunately, slipcovers offer no protection from potentially harmful flame retardants--the chemicals are not bound to the foam and can easily travel through a slipcover. The chemicals are constantly dispersing into the air, then settling in dust. Exposure comes primarily from ingesting contaminated dust.

Is my mattress treated with flame retardants?

If your mattress was made after 2007, it is unlikely that the foam inside contains flame retardants. Adult mattresses are now regulated by a severe flammability standard (16 CFR 1633) which cannot be met by including flame retardants in the foam. Barrier materials wrapped around the foam are used to stop fires before they reach the foam. Some barrier materials, like fiber batting, are naturally fire resistant, and others, like cotton, may be treated with boric acid which does not present the same concerns as flame retardants. However, there may be other chemicals of concern in some mattress barrier materials. There are companies that sell mattresses with a removable zippered barrier. Some companies can also sell you a mattress without the barrier with a prescription for a chemical free mattress from a doctor saying that you experience chemical sensitivity.

If your mattress was made before 2007, it may contain flame retardant chemicals in the foam. It is not a bad idea to consider replacing these older mattresses as your budget allows.

Is my child's mattress treated with flame retardants?

Smaller mattresses that contain polyurethane foam, such as juvenile and crib mattresses, usually do contain flame retardants.

What other children's products contain flame retardants?

We tested 101 foam samples from baby products including nursing pillows, nap mats, and sleep positioners, and found that over 80% contained flame retardants at levels up to 12 percent of the weight of the foam.

Is my carpet or carpet cushion treated with flame retardants?

Carpets are not usually treated with flame retardants as there is no standard that we are aware of that would require carpets to contain these chemicals. However, bonded polyurethane carpet cushion, which is over 85% of carpet cushion currently produced in the United States, usually contains flame retardants. This cushion is made from the same flame retardant foam that is used in furniture. One solution to avoid flame retardants is to use a natural wool, natural rubber, fiber or felt pad under carpeting rather than bonded foam carpet cushion.

Do children's pajamas/ clothing contain flame retardants?

Toxic "Tris" flame retardants were removed from children's pajamas in the 1970s, and it is unlikely that other halogenated flame retardants are used in pajamas.

Sleepwear for children under 9 months of age and pajamas that are tight fitting for any age should not contain added flame retardants. Look for a tag that says, "For child's safety, garment should fit snugly. This garment is not flame resistant. Loose fitting garment is more likely to catch fire," or similar language. This means that the fabric used to make the garment was probably not treated with flame retardants.

Some cotton pajamas may be treated, often with the phosphate chemical tetrakis hydromethyl phosphonium chloride (THPC or Proban aka Securest).