

What You Should Know About Flame Retardant Chemicals

What are flame retardant chemicals?

Until recently, manufacturers routinely added toxic flame retardant chemicals to furniture in order to meet outdated flammability standards. Companies still add flame retardants to textiles, electronics, children's products, and building materials such as insulation. Although flame retardants are intended to prevent or slow the spread of fire, their effectiveness in furniture has been called into question. Research by Silent Spring Institute showed that adding flame retardants to upholstered furniture does not protect people from the most deadly types of fires. In addition, there are non-toxic alternatives for improving fire safety such as sprinkler systems, smoke detectors, smolder-resistant furniture, and smoking bans.



What are the health risks?

Flame retardants migrate out of furniture into air and dust, and ultimately end up in people's bodies. Infants and young children are particularly at risk since they crawl and play on the floor, where contaminated dust settles, and frequently put their hands in their mouths. Exposure to flame retardants has been linked with cancer, thyroid disease, decreased fertility, and neurodevelopment problems including lower IQ in children. Researchers are also studying the health risks among firefighters. During a fire, firefighters are exposed to a soup of toxic chemicals including flame retardants. Compared with the rest of the population, firefighters also have significantly higher rates of cancer.

How can I reduce my exposure?

- ✓ **Ask for flame retardant-free.** When shopping for new furniture, ask for furniture free of flame retardant chemicals and look for items with the TB117-2013 label that says "NO added flame retardants."
- ✓ **If it's ripped, fix it.** Make sure the foam in your furniture is not exposed since exposed foam can release even more chemicals into your home.
- ✓ **Swap out the foam.** Instead of replacing your couch, replace the foam inside the cushions. Contact a local foam supplier and ask for foam without added flame retardants.
- ✓ **Go natural.** Choose carpet and rug pads made from natural materials such as felt, jute, or rubber.
- ✓ **Get rid of dust.** Vacuum regularly using a strong vacuum with a motorized brush and HEPA filter. Wipe surfaces with a wet cloth or mop.
- ✓ **Wash hands frequently.** It reduces the amount of flame retardants that enter your body.
- ✓ **Buy snug-fitting pajamas.** Look for children's pajamas that come with a tag that says, "This garment is not flame resistant."
- ✓ **Cut back on plastics.** Many plastic products, including children's toys, contain flame retardants because the chemicals are also used as plasticizers.