

Flame Retardants in Children's Products: Facts & Frequently Asked Questions

Summary

The Connecticut Departments of Consumer Protection (DCP), Public Health (DPH) and Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) want to make sure the public is aware that flame retardant chemicals may be present in children's products. There have been recent updates to flammability standards, and we expect flame retardants to be less common in the future. Given the known toxicity of some flame retardants and the potential for exposure, it is important to avoid these chemicals in children's products and other household items. This fact sheet provides information about why these chemicals may be a health risk, and how you can keep your home safe.

What are Flame Retardants?

Flame retardants are chemicals that have the ability to slow down the spread of a fire when used in clothing, fabrics, cushions, toys, electronics and other items. Fire safety standards require that certain consumer products pass a flammability test.



Why are Children's Products of Particular Concern?

Children have more contact with chemicals in products in their home due to their frequent hand-to-mouth activity. Children may also be affected more because of their smaller size, and developing organs.

The Connecticut Legislature enacted the Child Protection Act which gives the Department of Consumer Protection the authority to safeguard children from hazards in consumer products. The legislature also asked that the agencies compile a list of toxic substances that they recommend should not exist in products designed for children.

Why are Some of Higher Concern than Others?

The most widely used flame retardant chemicals have elements such as bromine and chlorine to quench a fire's energy before it can spread. Some of these chemicals, notably the polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) have been shown to be very dangerous, and have been phased out of consumer products.

There are a variety of potential replacement chemicals with tris-chlorinated flame retardants that have become widely used in recent years. However, several of the tris flame retardants have been prioritized as being of high concern as well.

DCP, DPH and DEEP have reviewed the toxicology and exposure potential for some flame retardants that may exist in children's products. These agencies have identified and prioritized three flame retardants used in children's products as being of high concern:

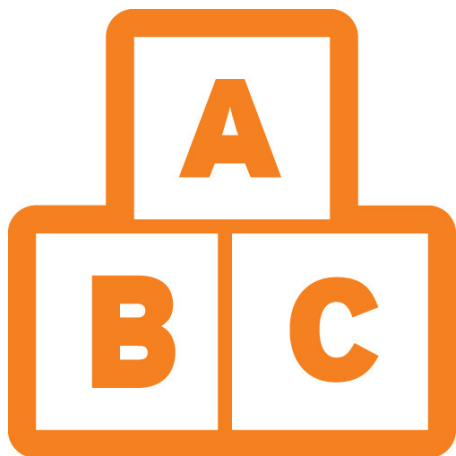
Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD);

Tris(1,3-dichloro-2-propyl)phosphate (TDCPP); and

Tris(2-chloroethyl)phosphate (TCEP).

TDCPP was banned from children's sleepwear in 1977 but is still used in other children's products. These flame retardants are coming under increasing scrutiny but children can still be exposed.

As the departments continue to review chemical ingredients in children's products, additional flame retardants and chemicals may be prioritized for listing.



Choosing Flame Retardant-Free Products

It's important for you to pick the safest products possible for your home. That means reading the label, and doing research about your purchases. The information below will be helpful to you in this process.

Newer is Better: Manufacturers are less likely to use flame retardants now that there is increased awareness about potential harm they may cause. Older products are more likely to contain banned flame retardants (PBDEs) which were replaced because of toxicity concerns.

Type of Materials: Children's products which contain urethane foam, such as cushions, padding and mats, childhood furniture, and toys are more likely to have been made with flame retardants because of the flammability of foam. Wool, down and polyester stuffing are less flammable and thus less likely to have needed retardants.

Manufacturers Who are Retardant-Free: More retardant-free furniture is becoming available, and can be searched for on websites and by talking with your retailer. You should ask retailers and manufacturers whether the product contains flame retardants before you purchase them. A product's label should always list the name of the manufacturer; feel free to contact them directly.

Are Chemical Flame Retardants Needed in Children's Products?

The latest approach to fire prevention is to ensure through testing that products will not catch fire from smoldering objects such as a lit cigarette. The incorporation of barrier fabrics between the cover fabric and cushion helps furniture and other foam products meet the smoldering test **without the need for flame retardants.**

Will all New Products be Flame Retardant-Free?

Manufacturers may still use flame retardants in new products, and retailers can continue to sell existing products containing these chemicals. However, a growing list of manufacturers have eliminated flame retardants from furniture and children's products, and consumers should feel comfortable asking for detailed information about the contents of the products they purchase.

Additional Measures You Can Take

Clean Your Floors and High Contact Surfaces: Studies show that house dust can contain substantial concentrations of chemicals. The migration of the flame retardants from the product into indoor air can cause them to settle into house dust. Frequent mopping and vacuuming is recommended to minimize this exposure pathway, especially while children are small and spending a lot of time on the floor.

Wash Your Hands: As always, it's important to wash your hands and your children's hands frequently in order to stay healthy - especially before eating.

Contact State Agencies with Questions: Our contact information is below, and if you have questions or complaints, you should feel free to reach out.

Agency Contacts for More Information



Department of Public Health:
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