

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Toxic Flame Retardants: Are they in your Body?”

The use of flame retardant chemicals in furniture is a classic example of a questionable use of a chemical: they are frequently ineffective in preventing furniture fires and are linked to serious health effects. Since 1975, an ineffective flammability standard, California's TB 117, has resulted in the foam inside our sofas, recliners, love seats and bedding to be saturated with toxic flame retardants. Recent studies have found that most couches in the United States contain at least one flame retardant chemical, whether or not they carry a TB 117 label. Because of the widespread use of flame retardant chemicals, Americans carry much higher levels of these chemicals in their bodies than anyone else in the world and California children contain some of the highest levels ever measured. Studies indicate that 91% of urine samples from the homes of American residents contained metabolites of Tris phosphate (TDCIPP) and 83% had metabolites of triphenyl phosphate (TPHP). Home dust samples were contaminated with these flame retardants 100% of the time. And, American mothers have levels of flame retardants in their breast milk that are about two orders of magnitude greater than in European countries, where many do not permit the use of these dangerous chemicals. Shockingly, children have been found to have levels of flame retardants that are five times higher than their mothers. Investigators believe that bioaccumulation of these toxins may lead to neurological effects and lower IQs with learning difficulties. In 1973, the American government mandated that all children's sleepwear had to be fire resistant and until 1977, brominated Tris was the chemical of choice, until researchers discovered that Tris can increase cancer risk and it was banned from use in pajamas. An altered version of Tris, chlorinated Tris, began being used in furniture and its associated foam. But, the chemicals do not remain inertly bonded within the foam or upholstery and they escape into the home environment and make their way into our bodies. During manufacturing, use and disposal, these chemicals are released into the environment where they can be found in air, water, and wildlife. They are carried on air currents as far away as the Arctic where they pollute native human populations, marine mammals, and even polar bears. Retardants have links to cancer, male infertility, male birth defects, autism, obesity and early puberty in girls, difficulty in getting pregnant and smaller babies.

In the America that I love, many fire fighters are against these chemicals and say that they do not prevent fires. Don't buy furniture that carries a TB 117 label. Regularly damp mop floors, dust furniture, vacuum carpets with a HEPA filter and wash your hands. Choose naturally flame resistant fabrics like wool, cotton or jute.

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