

Children's Furniture Contains Harmful Flame Retardant Chemicals

Popular characters hide toxic chemicals in foam in kids' furniture –exposure may cause health problems for our children

November 20, 2013, Anchorage, Alaska – Independent testing found **flame retardants in foam furniture for children purchased in 13 states and in Canada, including Alaska**. Fire safety scientists are concerned because flame retardant chemicals do not provide fire safety benefits in furniture, yet **exposure to these chemicals has been linked to cancer, hormone disruption, infertility and other serious health problems**.

"A Spiderman chair that we purchased at a Walmart in Anchorage was tested and it has a harmful flame retardant called Firemaster 550 in it," says Maricarmen Cruz-Guilloty, Environmental Health and Justice Coordinator from Alaska Community Action on Toxics. "Arctic Indigenous peoples already carry a high burden of many of the other toxic flame retardants in their bodies. Exposure to these chemicals is linked with thyroid disease, learning and developmental disorders, reproductive problems, and certain cancers. **Alaska also has the highest rates of birth defects in the nation. Our children should not be exposed to these chemicals. Kids are especially vulnerable to these chemicals.**" These persistent chemicals are carried via wind and ocean currents and concentrate in Arctic wildlife and people. People living in the north are also exposed through indoor air and dust and may have higher exposures because homes are closed in a for a greater part of the year.

Tiffany Immingan, a Saint Lawrence Island Yupik youth is concerned: "**I cannot believe stores such as Walmart are selling children products with chemicals that harm children's health**. People assume that when they buy products in the store, those products have been tested for safety. This study shows that this is not the case. I worry that the toys I buy for my two nephews might contain toxic chemicals. We already have too much cancer in Alaska and we should be doing everything we can to stop exposing children to cancer-causing chemicals like flame retardants. "

"Most parents would never suspect that their children could be exposed to toxic flame retardant chemicals when they sit on a Mickey Mouse couch, but our report shows that children's foam furniture can carry hidden health hazards," said Judy Levin, co-author of the report [*Playing on Poisons-Harmful Flame Retardants in Children's Furniture*](#) released by the Center for Environmental Health (CEH).

Soon, California's new flammability rule, TB 117-2013 will go into effect. Companies may use the new standard to comply with the new rule immediately, but will have until January 1, 2015 before they are required to comply. ACAT and CEH hope many companies will switch to safer, flame-retardant free products quickly. Even the Business and Institutional Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) stated, "**...we believe the risks associated with the use of these [flame retardant] chemicals is greater than the hazard associated with the fire risk from furniture without fire retardants..**"

Dr. Stapleton of Duke University analyzed the samples finding four classes of flame retardants in 38 of the 42 products:

- **Firemaster 550 was found in 22 items including the chair purchased in Alaska. This mixture of four chemicals has been linked in studies to obesity and disruption of the bodies' natural hormone functioning.**
- TCPP – Tris was found in 5 items. Animal studies have linked exposure to TCPP to genetic damage and changes in the length of the menstrual cycle.
- TDCPP - Chlorinated Tris was found in 2 items. Studies have linked TDCPP exposures to cancer, genetic damage, effects on fertility and natural hormones, and damage to developing embryos. Health concerns forced companies to remove TDCPP from children's pajamas in the 1970's yet it is still widely used in other products.

Children are more vulnerable to toxic flame retardant chemicals than adults. Children put their hands in their mouths often, and touch whatever is near them. Young children crawl and play where dust containing high levels of flame retardants settles in homes, daycares and schools. A (2011) study from UC Berkeley's Center for Environmental Research found that children carry on average three times higher levels of flame retardants in their bodies than the levels found in their mothers. Other recent studies show that children of color and children from low-income communities have high levels of flame retardant chemicals in their bodies.

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Available for Interviews

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*Pamela and Vi can address how unregulated persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic chemicals drift North and disproportionately impact indigenous Arctic people.

For media assistance: [National Alliance for Toxic-Free Fire Safety](#) is a great media resource.

- Stephenie Hendricks, 415-258 9151, stephdh@earthlink.net, www.toxicfreefiresafety.org
- Heather McCausland, 907-355-0446, heather@akaction.org, <http://www.akaction.org/?p=2506>

Report is available online at: [Playing on Poisons-Harmful Flame Retardants in Children's Furniture](#) available at <http://www.ceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Kids-Furniture-Report-Press.pdf>

[Alaska Community Action on Toxics \(ACAT\)](#) is a statewide non-profit public interest environmental health research and advocacy organization dedicated to protecting environmental health and achieving environmental justice. The mission of Alaska Community Action on Toxics is: *to assure justice by advocating for environmental and community health. We believe that everyone has a right to clean air, clean water and toxic-free food.* We work to stop the production, proliferation, and release of toxic chemicals that may harm human health or the environment. For more information, please call 907-222-7714 or visit www.akaction.org.

[Center for Environmental Health \(CEH\)](#) protects people from toxic chemicals by working with communities, consumers, workers, government, and the private sector to demand and support business practices that are safe for public health and the environment. CEH also works with major industries and leaders in green business to promote alternatives to toxic products and practices. In 2010, the *San Francisco Business Times* bestowed its annual "Green Champion" award to CEH for its work to improve health and the environment in the Bay Area and beyond. www.ceh.org

[Center for Environmental Health](#) published this report with support from Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Clean and Healthy New York, Clean Water Action-Connecticut, Clean Water Action-Massachusetts, Ecojustice, Ecology Center, Healthy Legacy, Kentucky Environmental Foundation, Oregon Environmental Council, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, Washington Toxics Coalition and Women's Voices for the Earth.