

PRESS RELEASE: Center for Environmental Health and Alaska Community Action on Toxics

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Naptime Nightmares? Toxic Flame Retardants found in Day Care Nap Mats in Anchorage & Nationwide

Parents should not have to worry when their children nap at daycare



Anchorage, AK – Children’s nap mats from Alaska, Washington, California, New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut contain harmful flame retardant chemicals, according to independent testing commissioned by the Center for Environmental Health (CEH) in collaboration with Alaska Community Action on Toxics and other groups. The flame retardant chemicals found in the nap mats, which are used in daycare centers in Alaska and nationwide, have been linked to cancer, genetic damage, impacts on fertility and reproductive health, allergies, hormone disruption, and other serious health problems.

Alaska Community Action on Toxics, CEH, the Washington Toxics Coalition, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, Clean and Healthy New York, and Clean Water Action chapters in Massachusetts and Connecticut collected 24 nap mats, and sent them to Duke University researcher Heather Stapleton for testing. Dr. Stapleton’s testing found flame retardant chemicals in all but two of the nap mats. The testing found 10 different flame retardant chemicals (or chemical mixtures) in the nap mats; 19 of the nap mats contain more than one harmful flame retardant chemical. Eleven of the nap mats were advertised as flame resistant.

The flame retardant chemical TPP (triphenyl phosphate), which has been linked in animal studies to lower sperm production and nervous system impacts, was found in 18 of the nap mats. Nine of the nap mats, including one from a daycare center in Anchorage, contain the flame retardant TDCPP (chlorinated Tris), which is known to cause cancer and has been linked to genetic damage. Chlorinated Tris was banned from children’s pajamas in the mid-1970s, yet it still widely used in children’s products today.

“There is no reason parents should have to worry that their children will be exposed to chemicals that can cause cancer and other serious problems when they take a nap at daycare,” said Caroline Cox, the author of the CEH study.

“We are urging companies to take immediate action to eliminate all harmful flame retardant chemicals from their nap mats,” said Pamela Miller, Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. “It is simply outrageous that chemical corporations still use cancer-causing and other dangerous chemicals in products that children sleep on every day.” The report provides vital information to parents, day care center providers, and legislators with important ways to reduce and prevent childhood exposures. The report is available at bit.ly/NapMats.

Children are exposed to flame retardants from nap mats when the chemicals leach out into the air, and when chemicals settle in dust that children touch and ingest. A study of daycare centers last year found that levels of certain flame retardants including chlorinated Tris were significantly higher in facilities that used foam nap mats than in daycare centers that don’t use the products.

- Fire safety expertsⁱ and government studiesⁱⁱ have found that flame retardant chemicals are not effective as used in nap mats and many other foam products – so these chemicals are putting our children at risk of serious disease for no reason.

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- About a third of the nap mats we tested contain the cancer-causing flame retardant chlorinated Tris, a chemical that was removed from children’s pajamas more than thirty years ago.
- Flame retardant chemicals in nap mats evaporate into the air; a recent study of early child education centers found that levels of flame retardants were significantly higher in facilities with foam nap mats.ⁱⁱⁱ When you push on a foam nap mat and feel air coming out, the flame retardant chemicals in the foam are also coming out into the air.

Recommendations parents and day care centers can take to reduce the risk of exposure:

- Avoid nap mats made with polyurethane foam. Instead choose options that are not usually treated with flame retardants – choose polyester fiberfill, cotton, and wool.
- Ask nap mat suppliers about their use of flame retardant chemicals, and purchase products from companies that pledge they no longer use any of these chemicals. Labels or lack of labels did not ensure the product was safe.
- Frequent hand washing and vacuuming with HEPA filter vacuums can help to minimize exposures.

About Alaska Community Action on Toxics: Alaska Community Action on Toxics is a statewide environmental health and justice research and advocacy organization founded in 1997. ACAT’s mission is to assure justice by advocating for environmental and community health. We believe everyone has the right to clean air, clean water, and toxic-free food. Inspired by Saint Lawrence Islander, Annie Alowa, Alaska Community Action on Toxics has successfully advanced local, state, national, and international actions to protect people from harmful chemical exposures and to safeguard our air, water, and food. Visit www.akaction.org for more information or call 907-222-7714.

Contributors to the report include Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Clean and Healthy New York, Clean Water Action – Connecticut, Clean Water Action – Massachusetts, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, and Washington Toxics Coalition

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ⁱ [Upholstered Furniture Heat Release Rates Measured With A Furniture Calorimeter, 1982, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS](http://fire.nist.gov/bfrlpubs/fire82/PDF/f82007.pdf), Available: <http://fire.nist.gov/bfrlpubs/fire82/PDF/f82007.pdf>

ⁱⁱ [US Consumer Product Safety Commission: Staff Cover Letter on Upholstered Furniture Validation Memoranda](https://www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/129840/ufmemos.pdf) Available: <https://www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/129840/ufmemos.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ [Environmental Exposures in Early Childhood Education Environments, 4/5/12, \(p.66\)](http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/apr/past/08-305.pdf) Available: <http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/apr/past/08-305.pdf>