CA Adopts New Flame Retardant Rules

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California on Thursday adopted new flammability standards for furniture and other products that would allow manufacturers to stop using chemical flame retardants.

Gov. Jerry Brown said the new standards were a badly needed update to nearly 40-year-old rules that led to the widespread use of chemicals known as PBDEs to treat the foam found inside furniture.

Current rules require furniture filling to withstand exposure to an open flame, like a candle, for 12 seconds. This is no longer a requirement under the new rules.

Instead, manufacturers will reduce fire danger by focusing flammability protection on ignition sources that are more common fire starters, like cigarettes, radiant heaters, extension cords and fireplace embers.

Brown said the new standards will keep furniture in homes fire-safe while limiting chemical exposure.

"Today, California is curbing toxic chemicals found in everything from high chairs to sofas," Brown said in a statement.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says animal studies show PBDEs — polybrominated diphenyl ethers — can affect brain development, but human health effects from low exposure levels are still unknown.

California is the only state with a mandatory residential furniture flammability standard, a rule that has become the de facto standard for the rest of the nation.

Environmental advocates urged regulators to make changes, saying many of the products containing the chemicals are marketed to children, who are a higher-risk population.

"Today's announcement is a culmination of our long drive to urge the state to update a so-called 'safety' standard that was actually harmful to our health," said Michael Green of the Center for Environmental Health, said.

The rules require manufacturers to be in compliance by Jan. 1, 2015.

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