

Press Brief



Building the case for
Flame Retardant Free Furniture in Europe
Stakeholder Alliance

Launch of policy paper and lecture on “The Science and Policy of Flame Retardants and Flammability Standards”

8 September at 13.00 in 61 Rue du Trône, Brussels

Agenda:

- 13.00** Launch of policy paper “The Case For Flame Retardant Free Furniture”
- 13.15** “The Science and Policy of Flame Retardants and Flammability Standards” by
Arlene Blum, Green Science Policy Institute
- 13.45** Q&A

Registration [here](#), a light lunch will be served.

Short intro:

A variety of flammability standards for furniture exist in Europe. Some standards lead to the use of hazardous flame retardant chemicals without providing a demonstrated fire safety benefit. An alliance of Industry, NGOs and Trade Unions is presenting the policy paper: “The Case for Flame Retardant Free Furniture in Europe”. Key note speech by Arlene Blum on “The Science and Policy of Flame Retardants and Flammability Standards”

Arlene Blum PhD is a biophysical chemist, author, and mountaineer and Director of the Green Science Policy Institute. Blum’s awards include selection by the UK Guardian as one of the world’s 100 most inspiring women and National Women’s History Project selection as one of 100 “Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet”. [Portrait in NY Times](#).

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Stakeholder Alliance:

An alliance representing a wide range of interests in society has joined forces to fight against the use of harmful flame retardants in furniture.

The alliance gathers industry, environmental NGOs, cancer organisations, fire fighters and the labour union. Members of the alliance are:

- The European Fire Fighter Unions Alliance ([EFFUA](#))
- European Environmental Citizens Organisation for Standardisation ([ECOS](#))
- European Environmental Bureau ([EEB](#))
- Zero Waste Europe ([ZWE](#))
- The Cancer Prevention and Education Society ([Cancer Prevention](#))
- European Furniture Industries Confederation ([EFIC](#))
- European Bedding Industries Association ([EBIA](#))
- European Federation of Building and Woodworkers ([EFBWW](#))
- CHEM Trust - Protecting humans and wildlife from harmful chemicals ([CHEM Trust](#))
- Health and Environment Alliance ([HEAL](#))



Key Note Speaker, Arlene Blum:

Arlene Blum has been a leader in the scientific research and campaign against the harm from flame retardant chemicals in the USA. Her efforts have contributed to a policy change on furniture flammability standards in California.



Arlene Blum PhD, biophysical chemist, author, and mountaineer is a Visiting Scholar in Chemistry at UC Berkeley and executive director of the Green Science Policy Institute. The Institute brings government, industry, scientists and citizens groups together to support chemical policies to protect human health and the global environment.

Blum's research and policy work has contributed to preventing the use of flame retardants and other harmful chemicals in children's sleepwear, furniture, electronics, and other products world-wide. Her awards include selection by the UK Guardian as one of the world's 100 most inspiring women and National Women's History Project selection as one of 100 "Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet". Her current "mountain," which she considers her life's most challenging and important, is to educate decision makers in industry and government to reduce the use of entire classes of

harmful chemicals. Arlene Blum received her PhD in Biophysical chemistry from UC Berkeley and has taught at UC Berkeley, Stanford University, and Wellesly College.

Draft Press Release

Concerned flame retardants cause more harm than safety

There are several different fire safety standards for furniture in Europe. Some standards lead to the use of flame retardant chemicals. Scientific research shows that many flame retardants are hazardous to both human health and the environment, without providing a demonstrated fire safety benefit.

A wide alliance of stakeholders ranging from environmental NGOs to industry, cancer organisations, fire fighters and labour unions are coming forth to raise awareness about the risks and concerns of using hazardous flame retardants in furniture.

Furniture flammability standards that lead to the use of flame retardants bring harmful and potentially harmful chemicals into homes, schools, hospitals and workplaces. Such requirements threaten human health, the global environment, and the recycling of furniture in the circular economy.

*Creating a real circular economy will be impossible for as long as toxic chemicals enter the cycle and are recycled into new products. We have already [seen kitchen utensils and plastic cutlery](#) with hazardous flame retardants. Toxics in, toxics out. **Joan Marc Simon, Executive Director, Zero Waste Europe***

There are more effective and less harmful ways to achieve fire safety, without potentially putting the whole population and the environment at risk. The use of smoke detectors is one way of increasing escape time as the fire is detected earlier, without the potential harm from exposure to chemicals.

*Fire fighters have a higher risk than civilians for a variety of cancers, and we know there is a concern flame retardants contribute to increasing that risk. Fire safety can be achieved in other means than using potentially harmful chemicals: smoke detectors and sprinklers are amongst the most effective. **Mikael Svanberg, European Fire Fighter Unions Alliance (EFFUA)**.*

Flame retardant chemicals leak out of products and build up in the environment. They create a toxic legacy that does not disappear over time, but stays in the air, soil and sediments of the oceans - eventually ending up in the food we eat.

*If we can increase fire safety without causing serious harm to humans and nature, we should go for it! In the US, California and Washington states have already scrapped flammability standards which filled household furniture with hazardous chemicals. Europe should follow suit and end this madness immediately. **Tatiana Santos, Senior Policy Officer on Chemicals, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)**.*

The different flammability standards throughout Europe are complicated to comply with and place a costly burden on the producers. Flame retardants increase costs in production, while lowering the quality of products. This is a serious challenge to the furniture sector in Europe, putting jobs and growth at risk.

*As a producer, having to comply with several standards to be able to sell our products on the European market is unbearable. The existing multitude of National Flammability standards are effective barriers to trade in the internal market. **Markus Wiesner, President, European Furniture Industries Confederation (EFIC)***

Important steps to eliminate hazardous flame retardants have already been taken through REACH and other regulatory approaches in the EU. It is time for the final step through harmonised safety requirements for furniture that do not lead to the use of flame retardant chemicals.

Relevant links:

Following a successful campaign in the USA, the regulation in California has been changed in order to avoid the use of flame retardant chemicals whilst maintaining a high level of fire safety. Other states are following California's lead. Here are some useful links:

Chicago Tribune series on flame retardants: "Tribune Watchdog Playing With Fire"
<http://media.apps.chicagotribune.com/flames/index.html>

A short video produced by The Chicago Tribune: "The Truth About Flame Retardants"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kb4lFKyVjTc>

Boston Globe: "Mass. firefighters seek ban on flame retardants"
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/04/24/firefighters-seek-new-law-ban-flame-retardants/Zzv8aVoRN6WTcpKDIvV4cP/story.html>

Portrait of Arlene Blum:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/09/magazine/arlene-blums-crusade-against-household-toxins.html? r=1>

Politico: Are lobbyists playing with fire?
<http://www.politico.eu/article/are-lobbyists-playing-with-fire/>