



Overview

Toxic chemicals known to cause cancer and other health effects are prevalent as flame retardants in standard household items like couches, carpet, and children's products, as well as in firefighter uniforms. In past decades, many states mandated that manufacturers incorporate these chemicals into consumer products. These policies were enacted before scientists were able to determine the effects of these chemicals on health, and often with the strong support of the chemical and [tobacco industries](#). Today, new research has called into question both the effectiveness of these chemicals--such as chlorinated tris and polybrominated diphenyl (PBDE)--and the associated health risk to consumers and firefighters.

Legislation

- Twelve states have enacted legislation to ban products containing certain toxic flame retardant chemicals, including a 2015 bill in [Minnesota](#) that passed with broad bipartisan support.
- In 2016, 13 states are considering legislation to ban flame retardants in specific products, such as similar [North Carolina](#) and [West Virginia](#) bills that prohibit bedding that contains certain chemicals.
- A comprehensive list of legislation regarding flame retardants is available here: <http://www.saferstates.com/toxic-chemicals/toxic-flame-retardants>

KEY POINTS

- Chemical flame retardants are widely used in children's products, and children can have up to five times higher levels of chemicals in their bodies than their mothers. These chemicals pose health risks including learning disabilities and developmental impairment. ([Environmental Working Group](#))
- Flame retardants put firefighters at higher risk for certain cancers, including 62% higher rates of esophageal cancer than the general public. The toxic smoke created by the burning of these chemicals can penetrate protective gear. ([Marine & Environmental Research Institute](#))
- Chemicals, such as [PBDEs](#), integrate into dust around homes, and leech into the environment where they become harmful to wildlife populations such as eagles. ([Michigan Radio](#))
- Safer alternatives exist that still meet fire safety standards. You can find out more about specific alternatives here: <http://www.epa.gov/dfe/pubs/flameret/ffr-alt.htm>

Other Resources

- Minnesota Professional Firefighters [info sheet](#).
- Washington Toxics Coalition "[Something's in the Air](#)" report.

