

# MomsRising.org

## Stories from NC Moms Concerned about Toxic Flame Retardants in Bedding

Dear Lawmaker,

I'm writing to you today on behalf of MomsRising and our almost 41,000 NC members from all 100 counties. As parents, we want to make sure our children grow up in safe and healthy environments. That's why MomsRising is part of a growing movement of scientists, health experts, and advocates working to ensure the safety of the products our families come into contact with every day.

Snuggling up with our kids for a bedtime story and tucking them in bed at night are treasured routines for many families. Our children's beds are places where they should feel safe and protected.

But unfortunately many types of bedding, including mattresses, bassinet pads, co-sleepers, and even nursing pillows have been found to contain toxic flame retardants that have been associated with serious negative health impacts for children and adults. At the same time, many toxic flame retardants don't have a proven track record of significantly preventing fires.

Earlier this year, thousands of MomsRising members signed our petition calling on the Consumer Product Safety Commission to ban organohalogen flame retardants from certain consumer products, including mattresses. In doing so, we joined with the American Academy of Pediatrics, the International Association of Fire Fighters, and many more in saying these toxic chemicals should not be in our homes.

These types of chemicals continue to be frequently used in consumer products despite research showing this entire class of chemicals can be associated with serious human health problems, including cancer, infertility, decreased IQ in children, impaired memory, learning deficits, hyperactivity, hormone disruption and lowered immunity.

Not only can these products be unsafe for our families, they can also be harmful to the firefighters we rely upon should fire strike our homes.

Studies show that these types of flame retardants can actually cause fire and smoke to become more toxic as they burn. The International Association of Fire Fighters has determined that there is a link between exposure to the fumes created when toxins burn and the disproportionately high levels of cancer among firefighters. A growing number of firefighter associations are joining with pediatricians, scientists, advocates, and consumers to call for the removal of these chemicals from consumer products.

It doesn't have to be this way. 12 states have already adopted policies that ban, limit, or label toxic flame retardants in certain products.

Below are stories from our North Carolina members about why toxic flame retardants in bedding are a concern for their family and why they hope you'll act.

Thank you for taking the time to read these mothers' stories. We hope to work with you to build a safer, healthier world for all North Carolina's children.

Sincerely,

Beth Messersmith  
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*NC moms at a stroller brigade for toxic chemical reform*

**Here are the stories of a few of the many North Carolina mothers concerned about how exposure to toxic flame retardants in bedding impacts their families' health:**

Please help us protect our families from dangerous, health-impairing, toxic chemicals. We all sleep on mattresses and have very few options to avoid sleeping on a bed of flame retardants. We deserve better and our children deserve better.

*-Stephanie Bell, Castle Hayne*

I love the feeling of tucking my kids in at night, knowing they are home, safe and sound. They will spend the night resting, growing, dreaming and wake up stronger. Or at least they are supposed to. But their little bodies will be busy fighting off toxins instead?? We spend a great deal of our lives sleeping. It's not ok that we must do that in a toxic place! Please ban toxins in our beds.

*-Jordyn Zimmerman, Wilmington*

We need bedding and sleepwear free of toxins. We take care to wash our sheets and pajamas because we love our children. There should not be toxins made into the sheets and sleepwear that we cannot wash away!

*-Catherine Denham, Davidson*

US bedding has been found to contain toxic flame retardants that have been associated with serious negative health impacts for children and adults. These types of chemicals continue to be used in consumer products despite research showing this entire class of chemicals can be associated with serious human health problems, including cancer. And, now we know there is a link between exposure to the fumes created when toxins burn and the disproportionately high levels of cancer among firefighters. These toxins should be banned. It's time for NC decision makers to protect its citizens!

*-Toni Kemble, Durham*

I have no family history of it, yet was diagnosed with breast cancer at a very early age (on my 43rd birthday!). I have reasons to believe exposure to environmental toxins likely played a role in my diagnosis, which ultimately resulted in my losing both breasts, having to endure over 7 surgical procedures, suffering through months of chemotherapy and years of hormonal therapy. I am lucky and grateful to be alive, and feel it is important for me to do what I can to speak out against environmental toxins in order to prevent other women from their damaging effects on human health.

*-Kathryn Pezzi, Whispering Pines*

Like so many kids today, my kid has asthma, and allergies and eczema. I ask myself what was different from the birth of my first child. The answer was our newly carpeted house and a new crib mattress. I now know that flame retardants are toxic, and may have caused my son's health issues. How can this be legal? I thought we were protected, but I was wrong. Now is the chance to prevent costly suffering of our children by banning known toxins like flame retardants in our kids' products.

*-Jeannine Sato, Durham*

Toxic flame retardants do much harm and little if any good. Firefighters who once were convinced that flame retardants would save the lives of infants and toddlers now have learned that they are carcinogenic when burned. For the safety of young children, their families, and firefighters, it is time to ban toxic flame retardants.

*-Leona Whichard, Chapel Hill*

Please remove flame retardants from children's clothing and bedding materials. Children and babies are the most susceptible to toxins in our environment. To expose them at such an early age to toxins is believed to increase their chances of developing cancer, autoimmune diseases and many other illnesses. Our whole environment should be toxin free, but at least we can concentrate for now on children and babies.

*-Chris Shewchuck, Charlotte*

Because I can't tell from the label whether toxic chemicals are in my daughter's bedding, I need the help of the General Assembly to protect her.

*-Carol Brooke, Carrboro*

I'm a mom with a son and a daughter. I'm very alarmed as I learn more and more about the toxic chemicals that they are and will be exposed to. Our family has tried to be quite proactive, even before we had children about avoiding toxins: we bought organic produce, were scrupulous about not scratching our Teflon pans, made our own non-toxic cleaners, didn't heat food in plastic, ate limited amounts of seafood, used low or no-VOC paints, have never used pesticides on our yard and garden. We thought we were doing pretty well. But when I was expecting and researched baby products, I kept learning about more toxins everywhere, including in our crib mattress, changing pads, nursing pillows, car seats, and now in their big kid beds.

It's enough to make you paranoid. I'm not, just frustrated at how much time it takes to discover something and try to figure out the alternatives and I know much of our exposure I can't change. I also know that my kids' exposure is both greater than mine (gram toxin to pound of body weight, my son also plays on the floor and breathes air in the bottom few feet - and toxins such as PBDEs settle out of the air and are in higher concentrations at lower levels) and matters more. Their bodies are still growing and developing and many toxins play a role in altering developmental pathways. One study found 287 foreign chemicals in cord blood.

So, even before they were born, my children was starting to accumulate their toxic load. I worry about the health effects that have already been wrecked, but which we won't know about for decades. How unfair that they can't start out with a clean bill of health. My dad had prostate cancer at a relatively young age. It's hard to link any particular individual's illness to toxins, but we know when we look on the aggregate, that the rates of serious and chronic health conditions (including most cancers) are on the rise and that there is mounting evidence linking these rises to toxic chemicals. So, I'll never know if my dad's prostate cancer was because of toxins or not, but I'll always wonder. I'm busy enough as a mom and have plenty of things to worry about. I'd rather my job didn't include trying to avoid toxins in products that I didn't ask for and would prefer weren't there.

*-Kristie Mather, Durham*

I submitted a sample from my son's car seat for toxic chemical testing. The seat he rides in almost daily -- that is supposed to provide him with safety and security -- was found to contain the flame retardant Tris (chloropropyl) phosphate, or TCPP. This makes me sick. And it may make my child sick, which makes me incredibly angry and upset. While I haven't had his bedding officially tested, I worry that it also contains harmful flame retardants. As a consumer, when I make a purchase for a basic need such as bedding or a car seat, I expect it to be of high quality -- safe, secure, comfortable -- not full of chemicals that have been proven to be harmful, especially for small children. We must get toxic chemicals out of products that our families use every day.

*-Melea Rose-Waters, Wake Forest*

I am not AT ALL interested in the toxic chemicals that make up some flame retardant products. Why would I expose my children and family to those chemicals? Protecting them from fire so we can kill them with chemicals? I don't think so.

*-Carol, Denton*

It's a constant daily struggle to take control of your well-being and protect your family. An ongoing battle with the corporations who continue to put profits before people. A sad state of affairs.

*-Elaine Lite, Asheville*

I'm not a chemist, but it shouldn't take a degree in chemistry for me to understand the implications of my purchases on my family's health. I shouldn't have to decide between summer camps and organic mattresses. I shouldn't have to weigh the risk of harm to my sons' developing brains from sleeping on toxin-soaked mattresses. But mostly? Mostly I'm just really mad. The phthalates in my shampoo and body lotions transferred to my fetuses, and then to my nursing newborns. I took my 3-day-old sons home in car seats coated in a cocktail of phthalates and flame retardants. The foam in the couch that I read bedtime stories on with my children is soaked in chlorinated Tris, a flame retardant. As our couches and mattresses begin to age, Tris separates from the foam to begin its second life-- as house dust. Once you see dust as broken down organohalogen flame retardants instead of dirt? You can never go back. Industry removed Tris from children's sleepwear in 1977, because it was shown not only to cause cancer, but also because it caused burning fabrics to actually adhere to the skin. So why--and how--did it end up back in our couches and mattresses? Industry went on to replace Tris with an alternative flame retardant, PBDE, only to find out, years later, that PBDEs cause cancer. So in 2006, industry started replacing the PBDEs. With Tris. I'm mad for my friends that have struggled with infertility, or increased risk of breast and bladder cancers. I'm mad for my friends that continue to struggle with the efforts of parenting children with a wide range of developmental delays. I'm mad at the three-time higher rate of cancers seen in fire fighters and fire investigators. I'm mad that these flame retardant chemicals don't even do all that much to retard the spread of fire. It doesn't have to be this way. Y'all can choose to make a very simple step in putting our health first.

*-Stephanie Lormand, Raleigh*

I have two wonderful grandchildren. Toxic chemicals will do nothing to enhance their lives or health. Please make it easy for all of us who care about the health of our families to avoid exposure to toxic chemicals in the products sold in the United States.

*-Margaret Davis, Charlotte*

When my son was born, I bought baby gates, outlet covers, even crawled around on the floor to find choking dangers from a baby's perspective. I took him to his well-baby check-ups, got him immunizations, fed him healthy foods, got him plenty of exercise. I thought I had done everything possible to keep him safe and healthy. So you can imagine how frustrated I was when I started reading about the dangers of the chemicals in his crib mattress, car seat, even his nursing pillow! Everywhere we went, there were unseen dangers in the products we use everyday.

This month my mother faces surgery for liver cancer that has spread from her colon, my father-in-law will be at Duke for prostate cancer, and my husband's grandmother is getting radiation for colorectal cancer. In the past five years, I lost both my aunt and my grandfather to cancer. With so many loved ones battling cancer already, protecting my children from cancer-linked chemicals is not something I take lightly.

I don't have a degree in chemistry, but I shouldn't need one to keep my children safe. Manufacturers of lots of products are required to meet minimum safety standards and prove their products are safe for consumers. The same should be true for chemicals that manufacturers include in their products. Please support efforts to regulate chemicals in our families' bedding and keep our kids safe. No parent should have to feel like they are exposing their kids to dangerous products in their everyday lives. Thank you!

*-Beth Messersmith, Durham*

