

*Perspectives****Flame Retardants in the Home***

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*One of my earlier childhood memories is an overwhelming concern with flame retardants found in pajamas. I don't remember how I gained such knowledge at that age, but I remember carefully reading pajama labels with my parents at the store. Once a pair of pajamas was selected, my mother washed them repeatedly before I wore them. I couldn't have been more than 4 or 5 at the time, yet I instinctively knew that it was absurd to put flame retardants in pajamas because house fires were so rare. Somehow I knew that my chances of getting injured were much greater from the flame retardants than any fire I might encounter.*

Unfortunately, the woman quoted above is referring to her childhood in the 70's. Since the 70's, flame retardant use has expanded and it is now commonplace for cars, electronics, furniture, curtains, pillows, cribs, carpets, wood, and more to be treated with flame retardants.

Since then, flame retardant use has increased. The California population has the highest rate of flame retardants in the blood when compared to any other state, and also the strictest laws requiring manufacturers to add flame retardants.

Researchers in Japan measured high concentrations of flame retardants in household dust. Flame retardants enter the human body through inhalation of air and dust ingestion.

The presence of flame retardants in the

home and blood is only part of the equation. The effect of flame retardants on human health is another. Studies have linked reproductive and central nervous system changes to flame retardant exposure.

While Japan and the European Union have already taken steps to ban the use of certain flame retardants known as PBDE's (polybrominated diphenyl ether), the United States population has the highest levels of these compounds in their blood when compared to other countries.

Keeping the house clean and dust free is one way to reduce exposure to flame retardants. Another is to open windows to allow fresh air to enter and dilute the concentration of indoor air pollutants.

Furniture can be purchased without flame retardants when a doctor prescribes it. Metal may be a better choice than wood since metal is generally not flammable. The word to look for in products is “untreated”.

Until the government gets on board with health priorities over industry profits, the American public has to take their own safety measures and voice their opinions to political leaders.

**Reference**

Takigami H, Suzuki G, Hirai Y, Sakai S. Brominated flame retardants and other polyhalogenated compounds in indoor air and dust from two houses in Japan. *Chemosphere*. 2009 Jun;76(2):270-7. Epub 2009 Apr 9.

