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State lawmakers propose ban on PBDE flame retardants

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VIDEO: State lawmakers propose ban on PBDE flame retardants

While there's no question among safety advocates that flame retardants save lives, renewed health concerns about some retardants are causing Alaska to join states across the nation in trying to ban PBDE chemicals. (Rich Jordan/KTUU-DT)

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by Maria Downey
Channel 2 News

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska — While there's no question among safety advocates that flame retardants save lives, renewed health concerns about some retardants are causing Alaska to join states across the nation in trying to ban PBDE chemicals.

PBDEs are invisible but they're used in the manufacturing of countless everyday objects like furniture, electronics and appliances.

Two state Legislature bills introduced late last session to ban PBDEs by 2012 -- [House Bill 63](#) and [Senate Bill 27](#) -- are now in committee.

"I don't think that most people realize that when they put a child to bed at night, they probably put them on a bed that is full of dangerous toxins," said Sen. Bill Wielechowski. "I don't think most people realize when they're using their microwave, their cell phone, TV, their toaster -- even walking across their carpet - they're being exposed to, they're exposing their family to very dangerous toxins."

The Environmental Protection Agency's website reports that traces of PBDEs have been found in breast milk, along with fish and other wildlife.

Health issues linked to the chemicals include thyroid problems, learning and memory disabilities, behavioral changes, delayed puberty and other reproductive issues.

"Another thing about these toxins are, they are getting into our food chain," said Rep. Lindsey Holmes, co-sponsor of House Bill 63. "They have been shown to have particularly high rates in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region of the state in Western Alaska, because they're getting into our salmon, they're getting into our other animals."

Holmes and other state lawmakers are trying to do what 12 other states have already done and get PBDEs out of people's homes.

"Because currently, there are some safe alternatives out there and no reason to be using these," Holmes said. "And the problem with these types of toxins, they're in our homes, which means our children are exposed to them -- it also means if there's a fire, firefighters are exposed to the toxic chemicals."

"Chemicals that can cause cancer, chemicals that can cause developmental disabilities -- and I think as lawmakers we have an obligation to stand up and say, 'This is not something we want brought into our state,'" Wielechowski said.

"We want to do everything we can to protect families, protect the kids, protect the food chain," Holmes said. "And we want to make sure it's out there and protect everyone to the best of our ability."

According to lawmakers, firefighters across the country are supporting PBDE bans.

While some manufacturers are lobbying against the ban, some furniture companies like IKEA have already discontinued the use of PBDEs in their products.

Contact Maria Downey at mdowney@ktuu.com

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