

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Session

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SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

SB 27

SPONSOR STATEMENT

“Still one thing more, fellow-citizens -- a wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.”

Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801¹

SB 27 will support Safer Homes and Healthier Families by banning the use of polybrominated fire retardants (PBDEs) in mattresses, upholstered furniture and the plastic housing of electronics. In addition, it will give the Department of Environmental Conservation the authority to prohibit the use of other toxic flame retardants when safer alternatives exist. It will also move Alaska a step forward in protecting people from a variety of toxins by allowing the Department to participate with other states in learning about and sharing information on toxins.

PBDEs are persistent toxins that are included in furniture and electronics found in households to enhance flame retardancy. These toxins bio-accumulate, becoming more concentrated in humans and animals high in the food chain. Fetuses and infants are at particular risk as accumulated toxins are transferred from mother to child in utero and through breast milk. Pre-natal exposure may have lifelong health impacts that are not manifested until decades later.

Alaskans are particularly vulnerable for three reasons: 1) we spend a lot of time indoors with little ventilation, increasing our exposure to and ingestion of the microscopic particles of toxins found in household dust that are released from our furniture and electronics; 2) we eat subsistence foods that may concentrate toxins; and 3) through a process known as global distillation, toxins such as PBDEs are carried in the atmosphere for great distances from points of manufacture and concentrate in cold climates.

The impact and legacy of 30 years of producing and using these chemicals is yet to be fully realized and revealed. Alaska should join the 12 other states that have stepped forward to protect their citizens without delay in the face of federal inaction.

¹ http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jefinau1.asp, emphasis added.