

Fire Fighter Organizations across the U.S. Support Banning or Restricting Toxic Flame-Retardant Deca-BDE



Michigan Network for
CHILDREN'S
Environmental
HEALTH

Fire Fighters and their professional organizations across the country have expressed their support for restricting the use of deca-BDE (deca-brominated diphenyl ether), a flame retardant commonly used in consumer products. HB 4699 would ban the sale in Michigan of any product containing deca-BDE by 2014. Fire fighters have expressed concerns about their occupational exposures when deca burns, particularly given the widespread use of cost-effective alternatives that can help prevent fires. Eleven states, including Michigan, have banned or restricted the only other polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) that were in commercial use, penta- and octa-BDE, and these compounds have now been withdrawn by industry throughout the U.S. Four states have already banned or restricted deca-BDE.

INTERNATIONAL

International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)

- “Our union is concerned about the health and safety of our members as well as the health and safety of all of our citizens. Accordingly, the IAFF believes that the passage of legislation banning brominated flame retardants (Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) including Penta-, Octa-, and Deca-BDEs) is a step in the right direction for improving the health and safety of our fire-fighters and the citizens who are exposed to these chemicals.”

Source: Letter from Richard M. Duffy, Assistant to the General President, Occupational Health, Safety, and Medicine, IAFF, to Matthew Vinci, President, Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont, March 23, 2009.

- “Unlike other flame retardants, when PBDEs burn, they release dense fumes and black smoke that reduce visibility and a highly corrosive gas known as hydrogen bromide. In addition, PBDEs produce highly toxic byproducts of incomplete combustion. Although use of flame retardants saves lives and property, there have been unintended consequences. There is evidence that PBDEs persist in the environment and accumulate in living organisms, as well as toxicological testing that indicates these chemicals may cause liver toxicity, thyroid toxicity, and neurodevelopmental toxicity.”
- “Many studies involving fire fighters exposed to these and other toxic gases during active

fire fighting, overhaul, and long term exposure from these chemicals penetrating protective gear, have found that fire fighters have a much greater risk of contracting cancer, heart and lung disease, and other debilitating diseases. While we support the concept of flame retardant chemicals, there are alternatives that do not contain bromine or chlorine and are much safer for fire fighters than PBDEs.”

Source: Letter from Richard M. Duffy, Assistant to the General President, Occupational Health, Safety, and Medicine, IAFF, to Kelly Fox, President, Washington State Council of Fire Fighters, January 26, 2007.

MICHIGAN

Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs

- “The Executive Board of the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs has passed a resolution supporting House Bill 4699, a bill banning DECA-BDE.”
- “Deca-BDE and its family of flame retardant chemicals known as polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE) have been identified as having adverse physiological and developmental impact on humans.”
- “When PBDE compounds are exposed to fire they burn and release dense fumes and a highly corrosive gas known as hydrogen bromide which exposes firefighters to additional chemical hazards.”

Source: Letter from David Peterson, President, Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs, to Michigan State Representative Deborah Kennedy, May 29, 2009.

ILLINOIS

Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois

Illinois Fire Fighters Association

- “Our organizations are concerned with ensuring public health and safety, preventing fires by maintaining high fire safety standards, and protecting our firefighters from harm in their working environments. We support the phase-out [of] PBDEs—including penta-, octa-, and deca-BDEs—because it will help accomplish all of these goals.”
- “The elimination of deca-BDE will not compromise fire safety, but we believe it will be a step in the right direction for improving the health and safety of our firefighters.”

Source: Memorandum from Eddy Crews, Associated Fire Fighters of Illinois, and Margaret Vaughn, Illinois Fire Fighters Association, to the Members of the Illinois Legislature, March 20, 2007.

MAINE

Professional Firefighters of Maine

- “If passed, the law would see these bromide based chemicals, commonly referred to as DECA, phased out and replaced with phosphorus-based retardants that provide fire prevention capabilities comparable to bromides but have none of the negative health dangers associated with DECA.”

Source: Press release issued by the Professional Firefighters of Maine, April 10, 2007.

Portland Fire Fighter, Bobby Reynolds

Professional Fire Fighters of Maine

- “Maine’s firefighting community stands with one voice in support of [restricting deca-BDE]. With safer alternatives readily available that meet the same fire safety standards, phasing out deca should be a no-brainer.”

Source: Bobby Reynolds in phone communication with Matt Prindiville, Natural Resources Council of Maine, April 3, 2007.

MARYLAND

Baltimore Fire Chief James Clack

- “There are plenty of alternative nontoxic flame retardants available today, and some manufacturers have voluntarily switched to using them. Firefighters face risks every day, even without the added health threats posed by the use of unnecessary toxic chemicals in products we all use in our homes.”

Source: Letter from James Clack, Baltimore Fire Chief, printed in the Baltimore Sun, April 9, 2009.

MINNESOTA

Minnesota Professional Fire Fighters

- “While flame retardants in general save lives and property, the continued use of deca is unnecessary, as safer alternatives that don’t persist and accumulate in the environment and in the human body are available. As professional fire fighters we support effective fire safety standards and are convinced that phasing out the use of deca will not compromise fire safety in any way.”

Source: Memorandum from Tom Thornberg, President, Minnesota Professional Fire Fighters, to the Members of the Minnesota State Legislature, January 2008.

NEW YORK

Firemen’s Association of the State of New York (FASNY)

- “We are concerned with providing the safest working environment for these [first] responders and the need to maintain the highest safety standards; a big step toward achieving these goals can be made by banning the use of polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs).”

Source: Memorandum from the Firemen’s Association of the State of New York in Support of A7977 and S5244 to restrict the use of deca-BDE, June 20, 2007.

WASHINGTON

Washington State Council of Fire Fighters

Washington Fire Chiefs

Washington State Fire Fighters’ Association

- “Providing the safest working environment for firefighters, and the need to maintain the highest safety standards are of the utmost concern; it is clear that we can achieve both of these goals by banning the use of PBDEs.”

Source: Letter from Keven E. Rojecki, Legislative Liaison, Washington State Council of Fire Fighters; Mike Brown, Executive Director, Washington Fire Chiefs; and T.J. Nedrow, Washington State Fire Fighters’ Association, March 27, 2007.

Washington State Council of Fire Fighters

- “Many studies involving firefighters exposed to these and other toxic gases during active firefighting, overhaul, and long-term exposure from these chemicals penetrating protective gear have found that fire fighters have a much greater risk of contracting cancer, heart and lung disease, and

other debilitating diseases. While we clearly support the use of flame retardant chemicals, there are alternatives already in use that do not contain bromine or chlorine and are much safer for firefighters than PBDEs."

Source: Memorandum from Keven E. Rojecki, Legislative Liaison, Washington State Council of Fire Fighters, to the Members of the Washington Legislature, February 9, 2007.

VERMONT

Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont

- "Banning Deca will not affect fire safety."
- "Vermont needs fire safety without toxic chemicals."

Source: Burlington Free Press, February 18, 2009, quoting Matt Vinci, President, Professional Fire Fighters of Vermont.

MICHIGAN LEGISLATORS CAN PROTECT CHILDREN, FIRE FIGHTERS AND OUR GREAT LAKES FROM DECA-BDE!

Support HB 4699 to ban deca-BDE
in all products sold in Michigan by
2014

Network Members:

American Academy of Pediatrics (Michigan Chapter) • Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) • Association for Children's Mental Health • Autism Society of Michigan • Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination • Clean Water Fund • Clinton County Family Resource Center • Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice • East Michigan Environmental Action Council • Ecology Center • Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan • Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of Michigan • LocalMotionGreen • Michigan Chapter of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners • Michigan Coalition for Children and Families • Michigan Environmental Council • Michigan League of Conservation Voters Education Fund • Michigan Nurses Association • Science and Environmental Health Network • Sierra Club Michigan Chapter • Voices for Earth Justice.

The Michigan Network for Children's Environmental Health is a coalition of health professionals, health-affected groups, environmental organizations, and others dedicated to a safe and less toxic world for Michigan's children. Through education, outreach, and advocacy, we seek to protect Michigan's children from adverse impacts caused by exposure to widespread hazardous chemicals.

For more information, contact Rebecca Meuninck, Environmental Health Campaign Director, at 734-761-3186 ext. 119 or Mike Shriberg, Ph.D., Policy Director, at 734-761-3186 ext. 108.