

SB 27 – An Act Relating to Flame Retardants

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 27(HSS) Before the Senate Finance Committee

Q. Why do we need this bill?

A. To protect the health of Alaskans by reducing our exposure to PBDEs .

Q. What are PBDEs?

A. Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) are a class of chemicals added to foams, electrical appliances and other materials to reduce flammability. PBDEs are easily released from products as microscopic dust, which can be ingested, inhaled and absorbed. These toxic chemicals remain in the environment for extended periods of time, build up in fatty tissues, and concentrate as they move up the food chain. PBDEs are neurotoxins that can act as endocrine disruptors and impact thyroid hormone regulation.

FACT. Alaskans are especially at risk from PBDEs because:

- Seasonally, we spend a lot of time indoors, increasing exposure to PBDE dust in households.
- Cold climates concentrate toxins, including PBDEs, that are carried in global air currents.
- Alaskans eat wild foods that concentrate PBDEs – marine mammals and some fish species are of special concern.

Q. What Alaskans are most at risk from PBDEs?

A. Children. PBDEs are transferred from mother to child during pregnancy and nursing. Exposure to small concentrations of toxins at critical stages of development can have permanent effects on development. A growing body of literature associates PBDEs with neurodevelopmental impairments, thyroid disruption and other adverse effects on humans.

Q. Why isn't the Environmental Protection Agency imposing a ban?

A. They can't. They don't have adequate authority under current law. As a result, states are taking action to protect their residents from PBDEs, including Washington, Oregon, California and Hawaii.

Q. Will a ban compromise fire safety?

A. No. Changes in product design have reduced the need for chemical flame retardants and resorcinol bis diphenyl phosphate (RDP), identified as a safer alternative, has passed the scrutiny of the Washington state fire marshall.

Q. Will a PBDE ban hurt Alaskan businesses?

A. No. Existing bans on PBDEs include Washington, Oregon, 11 other states , the entire Walmart/Sam's Club retail chain, and the European Union. Products that are free of PBDEs are now widely available. One major Alaska furniture retailer has surveyed his suppliers and reports that the products his stores carry are already free of PBDEs. The Western Home Furnishings Association, with 1,000 members, reports no complaints with implementation of the PBDE bans in Washington, Oregon, Hawaii and California. The Washington Retail Association also reports no difficulties with implementation of the Washington ban.

Supporters of an Alaska ban on PBDEs include:

- Alaska Fire Chief's Association
- Association of Village Council Presidents
- The Arc of Anchorage
- Nome Eskimo Community
- Alaska Professional Fire Fighters
- Alaska Inter-Tribal Council
- Alaska Nurses Association
- Alaska Conservation Alliance
- Native Village of Savoonga
- Kristin Cox, Naturopathic Doctor
- Dr. Lauren Heine, Clean Production Action
- Karen McLane, Nome Health Care Provider
- Roxanne Chan, Spring Wind Acupuncture
- Marc Esslinger, Firefighter/Paramedic
- Peter Brigham, U.S. burn injury community
- Dr. Frank Von Hippel, University of Alaska Anchorage

Q. How much is it going to cost?

A. About 20 cents per Alaskan per year - \$139,000.

Although Alaska faces human and environmental risks from an array of airborne, waterborne, household and industrial toxins, the State's Division of Environmental Health has no toxicologist. The DEC fiscal note for this bill includes one toxicologist who would leverage resources and exchange knowledge with other toxicologists through the Interstate Chemicals Clearinghouse to better enable Alaska to respond quickly to health threats from other toxic chemicals. DHSS and DPS fiscal notes are zero.