

4/4/11

State Senate Finance Committee
Alaska Legislature
State Capitol
Pouch V
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear State Senate Finance Committee Members,

We would like to express our support of the EPA's plan to safely phase out flame retardant, deca-BDE over the next two years. This national approach will allow for a necessary and safe transition to the next generation of fire safety products. While the old product has saved countless lives over the many years, we encourage and promote this next step in sustainable fire safety products. As burn physicians and former presidents of the American Burn Association, we have come to recognize the absolute necessity of flame retardants. The truth is that fire retardants save lives. They add minutes to a would-be victim's escape time. The relationship between time of exposure and the extent of the injury is well known. The greater the surface area burns, the higher the mortality. We are committed to saving lives and preventing burns any way possible. Thus we are deeply concerned about any reckless and unscientific attempt to weaken standards and put millions of people at risk for serious burn injuries and death. Any individual state bill that would immediately ban fire safety protections without the development and proper implementation of alternatives is dangerous.

Devastating fires affect every person in every industry. According to a recent UC Davis study, some 2 million fires occur each year in the United States alone. These fires result in about 5,000 deaths, 54,000 hospitalizations and 1.4 million injuries, including 300 to 400 child deaths. The medical community sees the trauma of burns and the lifelong effect on the lives of victims on a daily basis. The brave firefighters and EMT's that are the first to respond to a scene depend on flame retardants to allow valuable seconds for rescue. The business community will be forced to change their manufacturing process and will incur much higher costs, leading smaller enterprises to bankruptcy. Universities and school systems will face a significantly larger risk for hundreds of thousands of students. Industries simply cannot afford to ban a life-saving product without developing alternatives.

The EPA agreement sets forth a rational, effective transition to newer alternatives, while allowing critical services such as police, fire and airlines to continue to use existing fire safety products that are critically important to saving lives. Manufacturers have already announced the production of environmentally-friendly fire retardants which minimize the use of raw materials, energy, byproducts and waste. We believe that fire safety manufacturers will hold fast to their decision to safely phase out existing products, and we commend them for their proactive development of new technologies.

As we make this transition, we must ensure that there is no unsafe lapse in fire protection. Therefore, we oppose any preemptive state bans as we believe the timeline that has been worked out with the EPA is the most appropriate. A national solution considers the interest of all Americans rather than just those of individual states, and this is the only way to safely progress in national fire protection.

Thank you for your time and effort concerning this extremely important matter, and we hope that you will join us as we continue to hold our nation to the highest fire protection standard.

Sincerely,

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About Us

Who We Are

Citizens for Fire Safety is a coalition of fire professionals, educators, community activists, burn centers, doctors, fire departments and industry leaders, united to ensure that our country is protected by the highest standards of fire safety.

Founded in 2007, Citizens for Fire Safety is a California nonprofit organization seeking to educate the public on safe fire practices within the home, as well as empower those organizations charged with protecting the public's safety. The coalition supports the efforts of the nation's burn centers, hospitals and fire departments, as these institutions serve burn survivors with limited resources.

The coalition formed in response to threatening legislation across the country, calling for the removal of a widely used fire safety tool. These bills set a dangerous precedent, mandating the removal of proven and effective flame retardant chemicals from consumer products without first establishing equally protective replacements.

Since its inception, Citizens for Fire Safety has expanded to become a fire safety advocacy organization. With coalition members across the nation, advocacy has many faces—from furniture retailers, to burn doctors and firefighters.

What We Do

Education:

The coalition seeks to serve as a medium to connect fire safety supporters across the country and to provide

information about fire safety issues to citizens, public officials and leaders. We believe fire safety education must be an on-going process, and that while there are many points of view on these issues, we must always stand on the side of safety.

Research:

Recently, Citizens for Fire Safety has joined with the American Burn Association, the International Firefighters Association and National Institute of Standards and Technology to conduct ongoing studies to ensure safe and effective fire prevention. These organizations are working together to protect the nation in an environmentally conscious and sensible way.

Advocacy:

With widespread support from medical communities across the nation, Citizens for Fire Safety has enlisted the support of leading industry burn doctors. Dr. Nathan Kemalyan, director of the Oregon Burn Center, aggressively advocates "adequate, proven and effective fire protection." Emergency Physician, Dr. John Ogle, defines Citizens for Fire Safety as an organization with a "commitment to saving lives and preventing burns any way possible." And, previous Director of the American Burn Association, Dr. Roger Salisbury has repeatedly voiced his concerns for any legislation that would directly weaken the nation's fire safety standards. The organization is also working to raise awareness of the potentially dangerous legislative initiatives that are pending in some 20 states to ban fire prevention tools, and prevent the orderly transition to "next generation" fire safety technologies.

Fire Prevention:

Citizens for Fire Safety proudly participates in the nation's annual Fire Prevention Week. Each year, the organization sponsors fire safety workshops for elementary schools across the country. These workshops facilitate conversation about the importance of fire safe practices.

How We Operate

Citizens for Fire Safety is operated by a small paid staff and volunteers committed to national fire safety. The organization's nonprofit status is: 501(c)6. Our efforts are funded by various individuals, groups, businesses and organizations. A portion of our funding which comes from various chemical industry leaders is directed towards funding further study of available flame-retardants and alternatives with the American Burn Association. These leaders in flame-retardant technology work with Citizens for Fire Safety in order to ensure that fire prevention tools are both effective and environmentally friendly.

The Advisory Board of Citizens for Fire Safety consists of coalition members from many industries and areas across the nation. These representatives of Citizens for Fire Safety ensure that the organization advocates fire safety in a thoughtful manner.

Opinion: SB 27, Flame Retardants is a Bill of Concern and One that Alaska Legislature

Government News

Juneau, March 8, 2011

"SB 27 is a bill that is proposing the ban of a life-saving fire safety product, without any conclusive scientific support," said Dr. David Heimbach, Professor of Surgery, University of Washington. "I have treated many Alaskan burn survivors at my burn center in Washington, and I know too well that Alaska is a state that is already short on its care for burn related injuries. The removal of this necessary product in household items will put the citizens of Alaska at risk."

Citizens for Fire Safety, an advocacy group, aligned with consumer, environmental, minority and industry organizations, respectfully would like to clear up some items from recent inaccurate claims, specifically claims such as:

FICTION: "These toxins concentrate 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."

FACT: While many of the products that are used in fire safety are found in the environment, the levels of these products are far below levels approved by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). No studies have ever shown any impact of these products on development of any fetus or infant, and the evidence of these materials in breast milk refers to legacy products that have not been in use for more than 10 years.

FICITION: "Twelve states have already banned these dangerous chemicals"

FACT: Companies have voluntarily taken these products off the market as new and more effective and equally safe products have been developed. Only two states, Oregon and Vermont, have banned these products and the legislation merely writes into law actions taken voluntarily by companies.

FICITION: "It makes no sense to allow their use in Alaska when safe and effective alternatives exist. Alaskan parents shouldn't have to worry that their household dust is toxic."

FACT: At this time, there are no equally effective alternatives to these commonly used products. Many of the alternatives have not received the same rigorous testing that would prove that they could prevent the spread of fire. These alternatives are being pushed by special interests that would like to reduce fire safety standards to sell more products.

FICITION: "Alaskan parents shouldn't have to worry that their household dust is toxic"

FACT: There is no known risk from household dust other than allergies. What Alaskan parents should be concerned about is developing an effective home safety plan in case of fire, and should educate their families about safe fire use.

FICITION: "Toxins such as PBDEs are carried in the atmosphere for great distances and concentrate in cold climates."

FACT: There is no evidence that PBDEs are carried in the atmosphere, in fact most PBDEs remain sealed in heavy plastics and in materials until they are disposed of. The fact remains that since Alaska and 49 other states have enacted strict fire safety regulations, fires in the home and other areas have decreased significantly.

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