

Chicago Tribune WATCHDOG

Sign In or Sign Up

Home | News | Business | Sports | A&E | Life & Style | Opinion | Real Estate | Cars | Jobs |

SPORTS
M-F 7P-11P
Weekdays
Online

Chemicals in the crib

By **Patricia Callahan and Michael Hawthorne**, Chicago Tribune reporters
December 28, 2012

Three popular brands of baby mattresses that were marketed in recent months to families and day care centers contained toxic flame retardants linked to increased cancer risk, according to laboratory tests conducted for the Chicago Tribune.

One member of that family of chemicals, known collectively as chlorinated tris, was removed from children's pajamas over cancer concerns a generation ago.

Yet that same flame retardant turned up in significant amounts in 11 baby mattresses sold recently by national and local retailers under the Babies R Us, Foundations and Angeles brands. Two other mattresses made by Angeles contained a related form of tris.

While furniture-makers often add flame retardants to the polyurethane foam cushioning in sofas and upholstered chairs, the test results on infant mattresses surprised and alarmed some scientists who have studied the chemicals. Babies and even toddlers can spend 12 or more hours a day in a crib, and foam mattresses can meet federal fire-safety rules without the use of chemicals.

Linda Birnbaum, director of the federal government's National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, said regulators had assured her that chlorinated tris and other toxic flame retardants weren't used in mattresses.

"These are bad chemicals, and we've known they've been bad for a long time," said Birnbaum, a toxicologist. "If these chemicals are in your child's mattress, they are going to be constantly exposed."

In the late 1970s, University of California at Berkeley scientists found that TDCPP, a form of tris, could cause mutations in DNA, and its manufacturer removed it voluntarily from the market for children's pajamas. When researchers look for flame retardants in house dust, they still find TDCPP, which was never banned.

The Tribune tested 27 mattresses. All of the mattresses containing chlorinated tris had one thing in common: labels saying they were made in China or imported from China. None of the tested mattresses made domestically contained significant amounts of any form of chlorinated tris.

The response to the test results from manufacturers, importers and retailers varied.

Wayfair, the retailer that fulfilled the Tribune's Wal-Mart order through the retail giant's online marketplace program, halted sales of the Angeles crib mattress, which fits cribs that are

1 2 3 next | single page

RELATED



Results: Flame retardant testing



Read the series: Playing with fire

Join Shell in Alaska

www.shell.us/careers

Experience world-class engineering with Shell in Alaska - Apply Now!

digital PLUS

PLAYING WITH FIRE

To read the rest of this digital story and more, you need a digital member. Choose an option below to continue. If you are already registered just sign in below. [Need help?](#)

Get started

Enter your Zip code to see your options.

ZIP code

[International User?](#)

SIGN UP

Already a newspaper subscriber? You are eligible for a **free** upgrade.

FIND ACCOUNT

Already registered? [SIGN IN](#)

[No thanks](#)



**A NEW JOB...
RIGHT IN THE
PALM OF
YOUR HAND.**

Download
CareerBuilder.com's
mobile app today.

TAKE FIVE MINUTES A DAY
TO BUILD A BETTER LIFE

careerbuilder.com

**GET THE
APP**

popular at child care centers.

One importer, however, vigorously defended its product.

Summer Infant Inc., the importer of the Babies R Us branded crib and bassinet mattresses that contained chlorinated tris, noted that the mattresses "are in a sealed impermeable plastic covering," which "ensures no exposure of the inner mattress foam to the child."

Responding to questions from the Tribune, the company wrote, "Simply put, the statements made are misleading and reckless in that they imply a health hazard that doesn't actually exist."

But Birnbaum and Heather Stapleton, a Duke University chemist who studies flame retardants, questioned whether any foam product can be sealed completely. They said chemicals escape when they vaporize and seep through seams or holes and get into air and dust.

And Inez Tenenbaum, chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, stressed that she sees no need for flame retardants in children's mattresses, which can be protected with inherently flame-resistant wraps or barriers.

"I strongly encourage all mattress manufacturers to comply with our performance standard through the use of barrier technologies and to avoid using any potentially harmful chemicals to which children can be exposed," she said in a statement. "The law strictly prohibits children's products from having hazardous chemicals that children could be exposed to and could foreseeably cause substantial illness or injury."

The agency is awaiting approval from its federal safety commissioners for a broad study of children's exposure to flame retardants in consumer products. Responding to the Tribune, agency officials last week began purchasing the same models tested by the Tribune for their own studies to determine how much chlorinated tris could escape and be absorbed through a baby's skin, ingested or inhaled.

The findings from the testing commissioned by the Tribune echo those of a California environmental group. The Center for Environmental Health, in Oakland, hired a lab to conduct tests but did not release the precise results in announcing its findings earlier this month. Instead, that group is using a California labeling law and the threat of a lawsuit to prod companies to reformulate their products without tris.

Neither the Tribune nor the Center for Environmental Health knew that the other was testing baby mattresses.

Copyright © 2014 Chicago Tribune Company, LLC

1 2 3 next | single page

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT..



Most ridiculous car at the 2014 Chicago Auto Show...



Ford pickups stolen from McCormick parking lots



New downtown scam: counterfeit parking meter...



Harvey Clarke Mansion future still controversial...

Best Reviewed Mattress

saatva.com
Buy a Saatva Mattress Online. The Best Reviewed Mattress of 2013

Top 7 Mattresses

comparetores.net/Mattresses
2014 Bestselling Mattresses Compare Latest Deals & Save Big!

Mattress Sale

www.mattress-sale.com
Premium Memory Foam Mattresses Free S&H, No Tax & Much More!