



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Health  
In support of H.3500/S.1230 An Act to protect children, families, and firefighters from harmful flame retardants  
By Carolyn Lee, LWVMA Environmental and Water Specialist  
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) has long supported toxic chemical regulation as part of its support for legislation that results in the maximum protection of public health and the environment. This bill should already be law. Please pass this early in this session. It is now established that firefighter's cancer rates in the Boston area are 2.5x higher than for other residents. These toxic chemicals, present in virtually every burning building, are likely a part of that problem.

For decades, toxic flame retardants have been used in upholstered furniture and other products to meet a California state standard for product flammability. Known as Technical Bulletin 117 (TB 117), this California standard became the de facto standard nationally. If you look at the tag under your couch cushion, chances are it will say "made to TB 117 standards."

These flame retardants are now linked to cancer, nervous system damage, decreased fertility, and other health problems and ironically, have also been shown to be ineffective at stopping fires. This fact was dramatically revealed by a 2012 Chicago Tribune investigative series that ultimately prompted a new California fire safety standard. The HBO documentary "Toxic Hot Seat" gives a compelling account of how toxic flame retardants became so prevalent and documents firefighters speaking out about the high rates of cancer from their exposure to these toxic chemicals while fighting fires.

Alternative ways to make furniture and other products fire resistant without the use of toxic chemicals exist. California's new TB 117-2013 standard that went into effect Jan. 1, 2015, states that flame retardant chemicals are not required as long as flammability standards are met. Some companies, but not all, are making furniture without flame retardants in order to sell to the large California market. Manufacturers do not have to adhere to the new standard except in California, so the burden falls on the consumer to find chemical-free products. Most consumers are unaware of the problem.

Passage of H.3500/S.1230, banning chlorinated Tris and other similar flame retardants, will ensure furniture and children's products sold in Massachusetts are free of these chemicals and make certain that upholstered furniture and other products containing these chemicals under the old TB 117 standard are not offered for sale in Massachusetts. With this ban, we will be joining 13 other states which have opted for banning specific flame retardants in products and have taken the guesswork out of protecting their citizens from these toxic chemicals.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, strongly urges this committee to give H. 3500/S.1230 a favorable report for the following reasons:

- To protect firefighters who receive the most intense exposure to flame retardants every time they respond to a fire where upholstered furniture and other products containing these chemicals are burning.
- To protect the public, especially children, who are being exposed to these flame retardants on a daily basis.
- To protect the public from future exposure to toxic flame retardants by creating a Chronic Hazard Advisory Panel to assess the safety and health effects of new flame retardants not specifically banned in this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.