

TESTIMONY OF
ALISON GILCREAST, MPH

REGARDING

H.B. 5218

AN ACT CONCERNING TOXIC FIRE RETARDANTS IN CHILDREN'S PRODUCTS.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN

March 1, 2012

Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children, my name is Alison Gilcreast and I am here today to express my concern regarding the exposure of toxic fire retardants to my child. I am here to urge your support of House Bill 5218, which would ban any product containing Tris from being marketed for the use of children three and under. I am testifying because I am the mother of a young child, and also because my family recently experienced a fire in our home.

On January 10, 2011, at approximately 12:30am, I awoke to the sound of our smoke alarm. The family was sleeping and my baby daughter was in her crib. The house was filled with smoke, but initially I did not see any signs of fire within the home. It wasn't until I looked out the bedroom window that I saw the corner of our house engulfed in flames. I have to admit this was the scariest moment in my life. Thank God we were able to vacate the house safely – pets included. Thankfully, the Plainville Fire Department came quickly to our rescue, and subsequently spared our home. I will forever be grateful to them.

Today, my concern is with Tris. After the fire, I spent some time wondering if our house fire had actually been serious enough to harm my daughter, would the chemical Tris have actually prevented her from being harmed? My conclusion has been a resounding "no." In my experience, it was the smoke detectors and our family emergency plan that prevented a more tragic outcome. That said, the unfortunate reality is that through her life, my daughter will be exposed to thousands of chemicals, and I believe my job as her mother is to protect her in the best way that I know how – I'll admit the chemical industry isn't making it easy for me. If her mattress, car seat, changing table pad, and other items in her bedroom contain Tris, then she's been exposed to this chemical every day since we brought her home from the hospital.

Let's put this into perspective. When she was a newborn, she would sleep nearly 15-16 hours per day, mostly on a mattress in her crib or in her car seat. If these products contain chlorinated Tris, she would have had over 15-16 hours of exposure per day to a chemical that has been called both a probable carcinogenic and has been shown to cause neurological and reproductive harm to those exposed.

Does the intended benefit of a flame retardant chemical outweigh the unintended consequence of the chemical exposure? I would say no. The EPA recently acknowledged that there is no evidence to substantiate claims that the use of certain flame retardants has resulted in a reduced incidence of fires.¹ As mentioned above, fire prevention education, smoke detectors and emergency plans are what prevents fires, not a cancer-causing chemical.

I would strongly urge you to be an advocate for parents and take the next step in banning Tris in all baby and child products. I commend you and your committee on addressing the health and welfare of Connecticut children and thank you for raising House Bill 5218. For additional information, please contact Alison Gilcreast at 860-395-9202 or at gilcreasta@comcast.net.

¹ National Resources Defense Council. (2010). Congress must act to remove toxic substances from products our families use everyday: Flame retardants TDCP and TCEP. www.nrdc.org