

Testimony by Mark A. Mitchell, M.D., MPH
In Support of HB 5218
AAC Toxic Fire Retardants In Children's Products

Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and members of the Committee. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 5218 An Act Concerning Toxic Fire Retardants in Children's Toys.

Chlorinated and Brominated flame retardants, such as Chlorinated Tris, are persistent—meaning that they decompose very slowly in nature, bioaccumulative—meaning that they increase in concentration in larger animals as they go up the food chain, and toxic. They have no place in children's products. Any benefit that may accrue to products having reduced flammability are more than offset by the health threats from these chemicals. These chemicals have been shown to cause tumors in laboratory animals and are suspected endocrine disrupters.

In addition, flame retardants have not been shown to reduce incidence of fires or significantly increase the time needed for a fire spreads in a burning building. In addition, chlorinated chemicals contribute to the greatest killer in a fire: not the fire itself, but the toxic fumes that are inhaled with the smoke from the fire. Smoke inhalation accounts for 50% to 80% of fire deaths. Lung damage from hydrochloric acid fumes contribute substantially to this toll.

Even without the controversy, we know that there are safer chemical and non-chemical substitutes for Tris that are effective in reducing fire deaths. Everything from smoke detectors—which have been proven to save lives—to using less flammable materials. In addition, there are non-chlorinated and non-brominated chemical substitutes, if those are really needed.

In conclusion, children are not just little adults. They breathe more air, drink more water, and absorb more things through their skin than adults on a proportionate basis. Their organs are immature and still developing and are therefore, more susceptible to toxic injury than those of adults. We should not be exposing children to toxic chemicals such as Tris—especially if the chemicals are not very--if at all--effective and there are safer alternatives available.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

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