Testimony of Anne Hulick, RN, MS, JD; Director, CT Clean Water Action and Coordinator of the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut.

Before the CT General Assembly’s Children's Committee, March 6, 2018

Testimony in support of HB 5329 An Act Concerning the Use of Chemical Flame Retardants in Children’s Products and Residential Upholstered Furniture

Dear Representative Urban, Senator Moore, Senator Suzio and Honorable members of the Children's Committee,

My name is Anne Hulick, RN, MS, JD and I am submitting testimony on behalf of Clean Water Action and the Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut (Coalition). The Coalition is a diverse, advocacy group comprised of health professionals, environmental justice advocates, labor groups, public health professionals, environmental experts, faith based groups, scientists and many individuals across Connecticut that are concerned about the large body of research linking exposure to toxic chemicals with the rise in serious diseases. Toxic chemical exposure during critical windows of fetal development and to young infants and children is of particular concern.

Flame retardant chemicals are highly toxic

Chemical flame retardants sound like a good thing, something we surely would want in products. The problem is they are highly toxic and don’t do what they are purported to do! These chemicals have been added to products containing polyurethane foam with the intention of saving lives by retarding flames. It is now widely accepted that rather than retarding flames, these chemicals that are highly persistent, bio-accumulative and toxic, off-gas and are commonly found in indoor air and dust. Research studies show exposure to these chemicals from indoor air and dust is significant. Infants and young children have the highest exposures, often three times higher than adults,\(^1\) as they are often in close proximity or in direct contact with the products containing the foam. Exposure to these carcinogens at such a young age is particularly concerning as infants and young children’s organs are still developing, even into adolescence.

\(^1\) http://greensciencepolicy.org/topics/childrens-products/#flame-retardants
No fire-safety benefit

There is virtually no fire-safety benefit to the use of these chemicals. Under the previous California Flammability standard, TB 117, products containing polyurethane foam were required to withstand exposure to a small, open flame. The chemicals were intended to slow ignition for a period of seconds. However, since it is the foam and not the outer coating of fabric that is treated with these chemicals, the fabric on these products will ignite anyway. Once the fabric ignites, the large flames are not retarded by the presence of these toxic chemicals. Further, the chemicals released from the foam increase the toxicity of the smoke. Exposure to this toxic smoke has been linked to elevated levels of these toxic chemicals in the serum of firefighters as well. Death or injury from fire is generally caused by smoke inhalation and not direct contact with flames. Deaths from fires have decreased as a result of less smoking in homes, fire-safe cigarettes and smoke detectors and not the presence of these harmful chemicals.

In response to this outdated and ineffective flammability standard, California recently updated TB 117 (see TB 117-2013). The current flammability standard is designed to reflect what actually happens in a fire and can be achieved without the use of these toxic chemicals. Several furniture companies, like Ethan Allen, Macy’s and Ashley Furniture, no longer use flame retardants in their products. This is good news as these chemicals are not only present in our bodies but studies show high levels of flame retardant chemicals in our waterways and in wildlife.

States Are Taking Action

Inaction at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency means that states must take the lead! Maine and Rhode Island passed this bill last session and Connecticut should do so as well. The rise in incidence of children’s diseases linked to toxic chemicals, particularly childhood cancers and neurobehavioral disorders is alarming. Cancer is the second leading cause of death for children under the age of twenty. Leukemia, brain and other childhood cancers have increased by more than 20% since 1975. The landmark TENDR: Targeting Environmental Neurobehavioral Risks consensus statement stated “[c]hildren in America today are at an unacceptably high risk of developing neurodevelopmental disorders that affect the brain and

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2 Shaw, S; Blum, A; Weber, R; Kurunthachalam, K; Rich, D; Lucas, D; Koshland, C; Dobraca, D; Hanson, S; Birnbaum; “Halogenated Flame Retardants: Do the Fire Safety Benefits Justify the Risks?” Reviews on Environmental Health Vol. 25, No. 4; (2010).

3 Shaw, S; Bergeer, M; Harris, J; Yun, S. Wu, Q; Liao, C; Blum A, Stefani, A, Kannan, K; “Persistent organic pollutants including polychlorinated and polybrominated debenzo-p-dioxins and dibensofurans in firefighters in Northern California” Chemosphere (2013) http://dx.doi.org/10/1016/j.chemosphere.2012.12.070.

4 Erika Schreder, Mark LaGuardia; Flame Retardant Transfers from U.S. Households to the Aquatic Environment. Environmental Science and Technology 2014; 16:10:16

nervous system…” and urged that reducing exposure to toxic chemicals in products was critical.⁶ We strongly support and urge you to pass HB 5329.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Coalition for a Safe and Healthy Connecticut Members:

Ecological Health Organization
Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Clean Water Action
CT Citizens Action Group
CT Coalition for Environmental Justice
CT Health Care Associates, NUCHHE, AFSCME, AFL-CIO
CT Council on Occupational Safety and Health
CT Nurses’ Association

Dr. Mark Mitchell, Mitchell Environmental Health Associates, Chair, Hartford Advisory Commission on the Environment, Founder and Senior Policy Advisor, Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

⁶ http://projecttendr.com/consensus-statement/