

# Life-Saving Flame Retardants Imperiled by Environmentalists, Says Science Group

By ACSH Staff — August 9, 2006

**New York, NY -- August 10, 2006.** Anti-chemical environmental activists even want to ban chemicals that save lives in fires, according to a new report. A class of brominated flame retardants known as polybrominated diphenylethers (PBDEs) are under assault from environmental activists and regulators both in the United States and overseas. So warns the non-profit science education group the American Council on Science on Health (ACSH) in its new report, [Brominated Flame Retardants: A Burning Issue](#) [1].

Flame retardants give people more time to escape a fire by delaying flashover, the explosive-like eruption of flames responsible for most of the fatalities and property damage in residential fires. PBDEs are particularly effective flame retardants and have long been widely used in the manufacture of televisions and other electrical equipment, furniture, and mattresses.

"The tiny amounts of PBDEs detectable in the environment don't pose a cancer risk, as the activists claim," says ACSH president Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, "but what the chemicals can do is save many lives, and that ought to count for something." Their use in television cabinets alone is estimated to save 190 lives a year in the U.S. In the United Kingdom, where materials used in many home furnishings must be fire-resistant, researchers estimate the regulations have spared about 1,150 lives and prevented almost 13,500 injuries over the course of a decade.

Nevertheless, U.S. and European regulators have effectively banned two of the three most prominent PBDE flame retardants and seek to ban the third, though there is no credible evidence that the chemical represents a danger to humans or the environment. Numerous studies, in fact, have concluded that our exposure to the compound is minimal and does not pose an adverse health risk for people at expected exposures.

"Just because you can detect a chemical doesn't mean you're detecting a health threat," cautions Dr. Whelan. "The amount matters."

If most PBDEs are eliminated, consumers will likely face a less-safe environment and eventually pay higher prices for products formulated with newer, as yet untested replacement chemicals, suggests ACSH. Current evidence shows that the benefits of PBDE flame retardants, in terms of lives saved and injuries prevented, far outweigh any demonstrated or likely negative health effects from their use, concludes the ACSH [Brominated Flame Retardants](#) [1] report.

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