CBS presents hype as news

By ACSH Staff — November 29, 2012

Does anyone remember when CBS used to be a respected news organization that did its own research or at least quoted independent experts? Or even conducted interviews? When it comes to health and science news, alas, it seems like they’ve been reduced to rewriting alarmist or sensationalist press releases. Last month there was the magic cancer bra [1] which the network claimed might detect breast cancer; then there was last week’s Trouble in Toyland [2] report from the U.S. Public Interest Research Group that warned against toys with harmless levels of phthalates in them written up by CBSNews.com in an article that seems based entirely on two press releases.

The latest is a story [3] on how supposedly harmful levels of flame retardants have been found in 84 percent of California couches. Eighty-four percent! (Well, according to that font of scientific research, the Silent Spring Institute, which tested couches in 16 homes). Again, the words said in a press release appear twice in CBS report, which also quotes a statement the American Chemistry Council gave to CNN. (Why didn’t CBS themselves call the council itself for comment? Or heaven forfend try to get real perspective from an actual scientist!). The story is replete with scare words like dangerous chemicals and hormone disruptors, carcinogens, and chemicals.

But as ACSH could have told the network, flame retardants are perfectly safe [4] and save lives. There’s no evidence that flame retardants cause adverse health effects and there’s plenty of evidence that flame retardants, well, retard flames, says ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross.

The fact that people are worried they could get sick sitting on their couch shows that this is a psychiatric problem, says ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. This is irrational to the Nth degree.

But Dr. Ross says that’s blaming the victim. What are people supposed to think, when the media so uncritically buys the claims of any scaremongering group?

ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom suggests that the only real danger of your couch is if you spend too much time lying on it instead of doing something active.
couches/