

## Key Facts: The Need for an Open Flame Test

A dangerous movement is underway in California to alter Technical Bulletin 117 (TB 117) in order to remove the “open flame” test currently required for upholstered furniture. Currently, TB 117 requires foam cushions used in upholstered furniture to pass an open flame test, which helps protect Californians from fires started by candles, lighters, matches and other small flames. The “open flame” test places material used in upholstered furniture into contact for 12 seconds with an open-flame which is similar to lighters, candles and matches, to test its flammability. Removing the “open flame” test would weaken California’s fire safety standards and would compromise public safety.

### Key Facts

#### Fire is Still a Threat

- Upholstered furniture fires from candles, lighters and other open flames remain a significant problem. According to the National Fire Protection Association’s (NFPA) facts on national fires: “Together, candles, matches and lighters were involved in 21 percent of upholstered furniture fires and 12 percent of the deaths.” The organization reports that 28 percent of upholstered furniture fires originated from smoking materials. Data from the National Fire Protection Association also shows that upholstered furniture is often the first item ignited in home fires resulting in deaths.
- According to the California Fire Sprinkler Coalition, from 2003-2010, California fire departments responded to an estimated 73,422 home structure fires. The fires resulted in 563 civilian fire deaths, three firefighter deaths, 2,072 civilian fire injuries and \$3.1 billion in direct damage.
- The young and old are especially impacted by fire. Research findings released in May 2011 by the National Fire Protection Association found that children under the age of five and seniors over the age of 65 were at the highest risk for fire-related deaths.
- If the “open flame” test is removed, California will be left with a “smolder only” test, which is primarily meant to mimic the effect of an ember from a cigarette. The cigarette smolder test was developed because smoking materials used to be the leading cause of upholstered-furniture fires. However, several factors, including a decline in smoking and stricter fire resistant standards on mattresses and upholstered furniture have been credited with the decrease in smoking material fire deaths over the last 30 years.
- Removing the open flame test will eliminate an important layer of fire protection for California.

## Flame Retardants Help Save Lives

- Flame retardants are designed to help products meet various regulatory and industry standards, such as TB 117.
- Dr. Matt Blais, director of Scientific Research at Southwest Research Institute, recently performed an independent analysis, using data from a National Institute of Justice arson study, that showed the flame retardants used in the study were effective in slowing the spread of fire and providing valuable escape time.

## Experts Support the Open Flame Test

- “Deaths, injuries and property damage resulting from upholstered furniture fires ignited by small open flame sources (chiefly lighters, matches and candles) constitute a significant, continuing risk to the public.”

– *The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission’s 1997 report on upholstered furniture flammability.*

- “Improved ignition resistance and reduced flammability of residential upholstered furniture may reduce injuries and deaths by 25% through improved barrier material performance, reduced flammability foam, and/or improved fire standards.”

-- *The National Institute of Standards and Technology’s September 5, 2012, publication, Reducing the Risk of Fire in Building and Communities: A Strategic Roadmap to Guide and Prioritize Research.*

- “The Bureau strongly believes that any national furniture flammability standard must address the typical scenario of open flame ignition in upholstered furniture.”

“Considering the fact that many open flame furniture fires are caused by small children playing with matches or lighters, the seriousness of such hazard cannot be overstated.”

-- *The California Bureau of Home Furnishings and Thermal Insulation’s 2008 letter to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, commenting on proposed furniture flammability standards.*