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Fire Safety of Upholstered Furniture

The Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) is the not-for-profit trade association for business and institutional furniture manufacturers. Since 1973, BIFMA has been the voice of the commercial furniture industry and currently has over 300 member companies.

BIFMA strongly supports eliminating flame retardant chemicals in upholstered furniture. The State of California, and many other specifiers, have moved away from open-flame to smolder requirements such as TB 117-2013. We supported this change and urge adoption of a regulation based on TB 117-2013 as a national standard. We encourage all regulators, legislators, code officials and specifiers to replace existing open-flame requirements, including the open-flame TB-133 standard, with a smolder standard based on TB 117-2013.

Given the increasing body of evidence that indicates the persistence, bio-accumulation and known health concerns of many flame retardants, we believe the risks associated with the use of these chemicals is greater than the fire risk from furniture without flame retardants. Studies have shown that added flame retardants may have little impact on the flammability of furniture and are likely to increase smoke toxicity during a fire.

Additionally, the potential for fires have been reduced by the following:

- Increased use of smoke detectors
- Improved smoke detector technology that reduces nuisance alarms
- Sprinkler systems
- Smoking bans
- Societal changes that include fewer cigarette smokers
- USA and Canada require fire-safe cigarettes designed to extinguish when not in use

As a result, furniture purchasers are requesting safer, more environmentally friendly products that do not contain flame retardant chemicals.

In addition to environmental and health concerns of flame retardant chemicals, we are concerned with the performance and cost implications of open-flame regulations. These regulations often require the use of fire-barriers or other materials that limit furniture design, negatively affect comfort, and reduce longevity of the products, and significantly increase product costs.

Manufacturers have indicated that open-flame requirements, especially those that lead to the use of barrier technologies (such as TB-133), may increase product costs up to 100%. It is estimated that less than 1% of the current North American commercial upholstered furniture products are required to meet open-flame regulations. The adoption of an open-flame requirement as a national regulation could lead to cost increases exceeding \$600,000,000 for the commercial furniture industry. Residential furniture industry costs would also increase.