



## BSEF response to the IPEN flame retardant report: 'A public interest guide to toxic flame retardant chemicals'

29 April 2013

The report that has recently been issued by IPEN entitled "[A public interest guide to toxic flame retardant chemicals](#)" is largely based upon the Chicago Tribune series "Playing with Fire." This report inaccurately portrays the flame retardant industry, creates misperceptions about the safe use of flame retardants and unfairly minimises the important role these chemistries play in fire safety. This could lead to a downgrading of essential fire safety standards and put the public at greater risk.

The Bromine Science and Environmental Forum<sup>1</sup> (BSEF) represents the major global producers of brominated flame retardants, which are used to increase the resistance to fire of flammable materials such as plastics in TV sets, textiles in cinema seating and insulation in construction. One of main aims of BSEF is to commission science<sup>2</sup> on brominated flame retardants and bromine in order to ensure that its products are safe for both human health and the environment.

The IPEN report implies that flame retardants do not work and are not an essential element of the fire safety toolbox. Reports by reputable experts demonstrate the fire safety benefits of flame retardants<sup>3</sup>, including allowing for a longer escape time in the event of a fire, which today in our modern homes is estimated to be a mere 3-4 minutes<sup>4</sup>. There are also numerous studies and fire tests<sup>5</sup> proving that flame retardants slow down the spread and decrease the number of fires. In the Rhode Island (U.S.) night club tragedy in 2003, one hundred people died in a fire after non-fire retarded foam, lining the walls and ceiling of the stage of the night club, was accidentally ignited. An investigation revealed that the use of the non-fire retarded foam, and the installation of this foam without a thermal barrier, did not meet existing building codes<sup>7</sup>.

The IPEN report also misrepresents the industry's engagement with stakeholders. BSEF engages with many stakeholders, including those with an interest in fire safety. In so doing, we strive to be transparent and we reconfirm our commitment to full transparency<sup>8</sup> in every engagement with stakeholders.

BSEF supports initiatives for product stewardship and increased proper waste management practices as recommended by IPEN. Our industry is proactive in taking responsibility for the products we put on the market, by encouraging downstream users to reduce emissions of flame retardants at production and processing phase by implementing best practices. The Voluntary Emissions Control Action Programme (VECAP) is a highly successful programme which has been adopted by many users of flame retardants in Europe and across the world.

BSEF welcomes proper waste management practices such as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

BSEF and the industry we represent stand behind its products that play a crucial role in reducing the risk of fires that threaten lives and property of millions of people around the world. These flame retardant products have proven they do one thing exceedingly well: prevent injury or death; safely, effectively and efficiently. We strongly disagree with any media reports or special interest groups which attempt to refute the life-saving, injury-reducing performance of these products and urge caution before reducing proven fire safety standards and ignoring flame retardants' important contribution to fire safety.

<sup>1</sup> BSEF is the international organisation of the bromine chemical industry, whose remit is to inform stakeholders and commission science on brominated chemicals such as flame retardants. <http://www.bsef.com/>

<sup>2</sup> See the science section of the BSEF website. <http://www.bsef.com/science>

<sup>3</sup> Steinhage, C.C.M., van Mierlo R.J.M., (2010), Efectis Nederland Report: Reaction to Fire Testing Sofas

<sup>4</sup> Brand in huis „Overleven of overlijden“ – Onderzoek naar de vergroting van de overlevingstijd bij woningbranden. J.P.A. Linssen, Hanzehogeschool Groningen. Opdrachtgever: Nederlands Instituut Fysieke Veiligheid. 2011

<sup>5</sup> Greenstreet Berman Ltd 2009 report on 'Effectiveness of the Furniture and Furnishing (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988

<sup>6</sup> University of Surrey report on 'International Fire Statistics and the Potential Benefits of Fire Counter-Measures', May 2005

<sup>7</sup> The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Report of the Technical Investigation of The Station Nightclub Fire, June 2005, [http://www.nist.gov/manuscript-publication-search.cfm?pub\\_id=100988](http://www.nist.gov/manuscript-publication-search.cfm?pub_id=100988)

<sup>8</sup> EU Transparency Register:

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/displaylobbyist.do:TRPUBLICID=4Gg1QkpVY2dHnLt9jzmFLJcJmSkk7T3TxFfNRhhNn5yFwKkkGI1395149453?id=05504109526-45&isListLobbyistView=true>



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