

[AHFA Position on Revised California Flammability Standard for Upholstered Furniture](#)

January 3, 2014 - On November 21, 2013, California Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. announced approval of the state's new flammability standard for upholstered furniture, culminating a year-long effort to address growing concerns about consumer exposure to flame retardant chemicals.

The "new" standard, developed by the California Bureau of Electronic Appliance Repair, Home Furnishings and Thermal Insulation (BEAR-HFTI), is based largely on the requirements and testing methodology within a voluntary industry program developed by the Upholstered Furniture Action Council in 1978 and later incorporated into ASTM E1353-08a: Standard Test Method for Cigarette Ignition Resistance of Components of Upholstered Furniture.

The American Home Furnishings Alliance supported the revision to TB 117, and AHFA staff assisted BEAR-HFTI on various technical aspects of the testing methodology for the standard. AHFA believes the updated standard addresses concerns surrounding flame retardant chemicals while not compromising fire safety for California consumers.

California's previous standard, adopted in 1975, included an open flame test for filling materials such as foam. Most filling materials could not pass the open flame test without the use of flame retardant chemicals in the foam. Because most manufacturers considered it cost-prohibitive to maintain separate foam supplies and production lines for California, TB 117 became the de facto national standard.

The new standard not only eliminates the need for flame retardant chemicals, it also addresses where fires actually begin, which is the cover fabric, not the foam, and focuses on the interaction of the cover fabric with the filling material.

The new standard went into effect January 1, 2014. Manufacturers have one year to complete the transition to the new testing procedures. The standard can be read in full **[here](#)**.

Throughout nearly four decades of debate over how best to reduce the number of residential fires that involve upholstered furniture, AHFA has advocated a focus on preventing smolder ignition and maintained that product modifications should be made only as they are proven safe, effective and affordable for the greatest number of consumers.

The TB 117 revision meets these objectives and also satisfies Governor Brown's mandate for a flammability standard that can be met without the use of flame retardant chemicals.

CALIFORNIA TB 117-2013 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. How does TB 117-2013 differ from the original California Technical Bulletin 117?

California Technical Bulletin 117-2013 tests the smolder resistance of cover fabrics, barrier materials and filling materials used in upholstered furniture construction. Each of the three components is tested using a mock-up that resembles a small chair seat and back. The assembly is exposed to a lighted cigarette as an ignition source. The material fails the test if it transitions to an open flame or is still smoldering after 45 minutes. The materials used in the test must not contain

flame retardant chemicals.

In the original TB 117, the filling material was exposed to a 12 second “open flame” ignition source. The material failed if it ignited.

Q. How will manufacturers comply with the new standard? TB 117-2013 tells manufacturers exactly how to construct the mock-up for testing cover fabrics, barrier materials and filling materials. The pass/fail criteria likewise are stipulated in the standard. Any fabric, barrier material or filling material that passed the old TB 117 does not need to be re-tested. Any NEW fabrics, barrier materials or filling materials introduced after January 1, 2015, must be tested using the new procedure and labeled as TB 117-2013 compliant.

Q. What is the timeline for compliance? Manufacturers have from January 1, 2014, to January 1, 2015, to transition to the new testing procedure. After January 1, 2015, all new products sold in California must be tested to the new standard and labeled as compliant.

Q. What is the estimated cost of compliance? Manufacturers selling products in California were already testing to the TB 117 standard. There will be little or no cost involved in switching to the new testing procedure.

Q. How can consumers identify products that comply with TB 117-2013? A label on the product - usually underneath a seat cushion - will state that the product is “TB 117-2013 compliant.” If the label says the product is “TB 117 compliant,” the consumer will know that the product was manufactured prior to January 1, 2015.

Q. How can consumers find products that do NOT contain flame retardant chemicals? TB 117-2013 does not prohibit the use of flame retardant chemicals in upholstered furniture. It only prohibits the use of such chemicals in the materials used for the smolder test. In other words, companies may not use FR chemicals to help them pass the smolder test, but they may, if they choose, continue using them in finished products. Therefore, a TB 117-2013-compliant label does **not** mean that the product is free of FR chemicals.

Based on consumer interest, it is likely some manufacturers will choose to eliminate materials treated with FR chemicals from their products. These manufacturers are also likely to begin labeling their products as being free of FR chemicals. Some environmental groups, like the Green Science Policy Institute (www.greensciencepolicy.org) have announced plans to assist consumers by maintaining a list of manufacturers that offer FR chemical-free products.

Currently, most furniture shoppers outside California have little or no knowledge of TB 117 and the use of flame retardant chemicals in furniture foam. Therefore, stores outside California are not accustomed to providing this information. Until more furniture shoppers begin asking about the use of flame retardant chemicals, stores are unlikely to have this information readily available.