

Compliance Issues Spur AHFA Membership Growth

August 14, 2014 - HIGH POINT, NC - Growing concern over regulatory compliance issues impacting the home furnishings industry has resulted in membership growth at the American Home Furnishings Alliance, the association reports.

“The complexity of issues like the new California flammability regulation makes it difficult for companies to remain on the sidelines,” says AHFA CEO Andy Counts. “Companies are joining AHFA not only because they want and need reliable and up-to-date information on changing regulations, but also because they want to be part of the effort to craft better solutions.”

Counts reports that membership among manufacturers and importers is up 10 percent since the beginning of 2014 - the largest 7-month membership increase in the last 10 years.

“Growing the membership has been a primary focus for us this year,” says AHFA’s 2014 Chairman George Revington, CEO of Home Meridian International. “Our Board Members know that a stronger and more diverse membership means a stronger voice for our industry. Our membership growth in the first half of this year is largely a result of Board Members reaching out to their non-member colleagues and urging them to support our efforts.”

AHFA is the industry’s voice on a variety of issues that are vital to daily operations. Among them:

Upholstered furniture flammability. AHFA provided key technical advice to California officials in 2013 as they fast-tracked revisions to TB 117, the state’s flammability standard. AHFA hosted plant tours, shared important research and data, and helped ensure the revised standard was workable. This year, AHFA’s attention has shifted once again to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and a proposed federal flammability standard. Although AHFA favors a federal standard that mirrors the California rule, other stakeholders are pushing for modifications that could be costly for manufacturers.

Flame retardant chemicals. The crusade against the use of flame retardant chemicals in upholstered furniture was bolstered last year by the HBO documentary, “Toxic Hot Seat.” AHFA received more than 4,000 emails from consumers after the documentary aired. Most were urging manufacturers to voluntarily remove all FR chemicals from their products. In 2014, the Alliance has responded to dozens of reporters and consumer advocates requesting accurate information about FR chemicals in upholstered furniture. A patchwork of state-level chemical bans is now emerging - a regulatory nightmare AHFA had hoped could be avoided. “There are some states where we have no members or few members, and that makes it difficult to fight these proposals, some of which will prove to be onerous for manufacturers if they pass,” says Counts.

Product safety. AHFA is actively engaged with the Consumer Product Safety Commission and the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) on initiatives impacting a wide range of residential furnishings. Standards for horizontal glass, bunk beds and furniture tip-over have all been updated in the last 12 months.

Formaldehyde emission standards. As the industry’s primary advocate on both the California and the federal formaldehyde emission standards, AHFA offers the most reliable information on the impact of these compliance measures. Last year the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released

a detailed set of implementation rules for the federal standard. AHFA described the potential impact of these rules as “grave” and immediately enlisted the help of member companies in detailing the anticipated cost of implementing the rules to key members of Congress.

“This last issue is a key example of a fight in which there is strength in numbers. When a rule like this gains momentum, a fragmented industry is no match for the political forces propelling the regulation forward,” Counts notes. “Fortunately, more and more companies are realizing they have a role to play and a responsibility to meet.”

The American Home Furnishings Alliance, based in High Point, N.C., represents more than 200 leading furniture manufacturers and distributors, plus over 150 suppliers to the furniture industry worldwide. AHFA is the industry’s representative on Capitol Hill and elsewhere throughout the United States on legislative and regulatory matters that impact the import and manufacture of residential furnishings.