



Office for Product
Safety & Standards

New Approach ...to the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations



Issue 2

1/5

January 2021

News & links for professionals in regulation

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Progress since September 2020

We are pleased to report on the following progress since the first newsletter, published on 30 September 2020:

1. Further engagement to understand how the current regulations affect our stakeholders and what they would like to see from the new approach.
2. Working with Trading Standards to understand issues relating to conformity assessment and enforcement.
3. Development and analysis of the scope, essential safety requirements and possible labelling requirements for chemical flame retardants;
4. Collecting, analysing and evaluating evidence – thanks for everything you've sent us;
5. Thinking about what further research we need to commission in order to build our evidence base.

Newsletters

We are delighted that you found the first newsletter useful and we are grateful for the feedback and evidence you continue to provide. Please keep sending us any feedback on the content of the newsletter, and suggestions of what you would like to see in future newsletters, to furniturefire.safety@beis.gov.uk. We will do our best to reflect this feedback as the year unfolds.

As always, please continue to email us if you have any other views, thoughts, suggestions, etc. which you feel will benefit the policy.

Outputs

This section looks at recent activity and what we gained from it.

Meeting of Independent Experts

Advice was sought from independent experts from academia, the Fire Services, test laboratories, Trading Standards, Public Health England and the Environment Agency.

They provided insights on potential 'essential safety requirements' and considered the potential scope of products that these might apply to. They also made suggestions for further research to enhance the evidence base to inform policy options.

Trading Standards Workshops

21 representatives from local authority trading standards teams took part in the two workshops. These included authorities that provide

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advice through Primary Authority to relevant businesses and officers with an interest and experience in enforcing the current regulations. The workshop was held virtually and primarily explored issues associated with conformity assessment, enforcement, and technical documentation. The potential 'essential safety requirements', scope of products the regulations could apply to and possible labelling for chemical flame retardants was also discussed.

IFF Research – Consumer attitudes to fire safety information on furniture

OPSS has a strategic research programme and its latest studies can be found [here](#). One study has been used to inform the policy proposal on labelling for chemical flame retardants. The report was published in October 2020 and is available [here](#).

Current policy development

Timeline:

(Please note, the timeline is unchanged from the September newsletter).



Additional research

OPSS will be funding a systematic literature review into the risks associated with flammability and exposure to chemicals of upholstered furniture products (risk of catching fire, fuel load and risk of fire spread, chemical exposure from flame retardants, vulnerability of users) to inform the scope of the products the regulations will apply to.

This work will require expertise in fire safety, chemical exposure and experience in undertaking systematic literature reviews.

The contract will be managed by a contractor appointed by BEIS and delivery of products and services for each milestone will be managed and overseen by BEIS.

The contract is expected to run from March to June 2021.

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For further information on tendering for the research or to obtain further information on the project, please contact us at furniturefire.safety@beis.gov.uk by **COP Wednesday 27 January**.

EU Exit

The UK's departure from the EU does not affect the formulation of the policy. The UK will continue to ensure the highest level of fire safety for domestic upholstered furniture.

Stakeholder Spotlights

What our stakeholders think about the policy.

Wayne Aaron, Texchem UK

What is your interest to date in the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations?

I've been involved in the implementation of the FFRs on upholstery fabrics since the regulations came into force back in 1988. At that time, working for a long established textile finishing company and for the last 22 years, working for Texchem UK LTD (Flamaway group). My company plays a leading role globally in the supply of many different flame retardant products which are used both in PPE workwear, curtains, blinds, mattresses and upholstery fabrics. The company is completely independent with no affiliations to any chemical suppliers and so we are able to choose and develop our own technologies, recipes and blends to suit our customers' needs. We work closely with finishers and retail directly and have developed new eco-friendly market leading technologies from these associations.

What do you see as the main challenges and positives to revising the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) regulations?

The recent Environmental Audit Committee report raised many concerns regarding the use of flame retardants in furnishings and many other chemicals found in the home. Whilst many in the industry would dispute much of the information that was reported, especially the use of toxic chemicals, it did highlight that many of the technologies used to render furniture safe against fire in the home do contain chemicals that many NGOs and some retailers would prefer not to be used. Significant R&D over many years is now bringing new FR technologies that are efficient on all fabrics and have independent certification of their green credentials. The use of such new products in furnishings should be seen as a huge positive as we can now make both furniture and foams without the chemicals that for some, and despite the science and test data, have been a cause for concern but still keep fire safety paramount.

The regulations are seen as complex and do need to be simplified and finding a balance is key. The current regulations are over 30 years old and a lot has changed in households since their implementation and so we do need to update them. It's vital that all sides in the supply chain can use their considerable experience and expertise in the decision-making process. Change is never easy after so long!

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What is the main issue that you would like to see come out of the regulation?

Quite simply that the UK maintain their high levels of fire safety in the home while implementing new technologies and chemistries that are independently recognised as being safe for both the home and the environment. We MUST remember that the rest of Europe has over 5,000 fire deaths a year directly linked to furnishings and that the increased use of electrical devices/chargers significantly increases the fire risk in the home. If these new FR technologies can continue to be rolled out, then all the different stakeholders involved and retailers will be more confident in our products. Realistically there is no moving away in the near future from synthetic fabrics which are low cost, durable and have a huge variety of textures and colours. However, synthetic fabrics are flammable and must be made safe for the designated end use. We can improve safety by implementing new technology. The FFR's have always been about improving safety and its why we have the safest furniture in the World and is still why other countries, even now, are looking at implementing similar fire safe furniture to (that which is sold in) the UK.

Dr. Kerry Dinsmore, Fidra

What is your interest to date in the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) regulation?

Fidra is a Scottish Registered Charity (SC043895) working to reduce plastic waste and eliminate the burden of chemical pollution on the environment. We use best available science to identify and understand environmental issues, working closely with industry and policymakers to develop and deliver pragmatic solutions that will support a more sustainable society.

Many of the chemical flame retardants currently used in the UK are recognised as damaging environmental pollutants. They can also represent a barrier to recycling and reuse, reducing our ability to promote a safe and functioning circular economy. Fidra supports regulatory change that removes these barriers, supporting sustainable innovation and positive environmental change.

What do you see as the main challenges and positives to revising the regulations?

The most obvious challenge has been in meaningfully engaging such a broad spectrum of stakeholders. There can be little doubt that the overarching priority in regulatory change must be the protection of human life, encompassing both fire safety and exposure to toxic substances. However, issues of scientific complexity, logistics and economics, have led to divergence in stakeholder opinion. To move beyond the current impasse, towards a pragmatic and evidence-based solution, the process must prioritise open and transparent communication, giving voice to relevant expertise at the earliest opportunity.

Since the process of regulatory update began, there have been significant advances in the field of toxicology. We now have a much greater understanding of the risks these chemicals can pose to both human and environmental health. This increased evidence base puts

us in a much stronger position now than during previous consultations. By removing the outdated regulatory barriers that prevent innovation, we have the opportunity to support UK manufacturing, reduce the impact of harmful chemical exposure on vulnerable populations, improve our environment and support the circular economy that is so fundamental to a sustainable society.

What is the main issue that you would like to see come out of the regulation?

Fidra would like to see the regulations updated to allow fire-safety through product design, eliminating the current necessity for chemical flame retardants. Where chemicals are applied, there must be a focus on transparency and traceability. The current system, where only compliance is communicated through supply chains, is ineffective in keeping pace with regulatory change. We therefore strongly recommend revisions that ensure full chemical content is accessible throughout a product's lifespan, including intended use, subsequent reuse and recycling, and eventual safe disposal.

If you'd like to feature in the Stakeholder Spotlight section of one of our upcoming newsletters, please let us know at:
furniturefire.safety@beis.gov.uk

Making regulation work