



the campaign for
environmentally
responsible
health care

Docket #0265

Committee on Public Safety
Boston City Council
City Hall, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02201

November 6, 2015

Dear Councilors Murphy, Zakim, and Members of the Committee on Public Safety:

We are writing to express our strong support for the City of Boston to update its upholstered furniture flammability standard by amending the Fire Prevention Code to require manufacturers to meet the performance requirements set forth in CA Technical Bulletin (TB) 117-2013, rather than TB 133, for fully-sprinklered public spaces, including health care facilities.

Health Care Without Harm works to transform the health sector worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it becomes ecologically sustainable and a leading advocate for environmental health and justice. Our organization partners with health systems and other institutions across the country to leverage the purchasing power of the health care sector to help shift the broader market away from products and services that may result in harmful exposures to toxic chemicals. In partnership with Practice Greenhealth and the Healthier Hospitals program, we work closely with institutional furniture manufacturers to inform these suppliers of health care's priorities and to help them align their sustainability initiatives with these priorities.

There are no fire safety data demonstrating that TB 133 increases fire safety in fully-sprinklered public spaces. The presence of smoke detectors and automatic sprinkler systems, and the prohibition on indoor smoking, significantly reduce, if not eliminate, concerns about fires in health care facilities and other public spaces.

According to major furniture manufacturers, TB 117-2013 can be met without the use of flame retardants, whereas it is very difficult to meet TB 133 on a large scale without these chemicals. Commonly used flame retardant chemicals can pose a threat to human health and the environment. Depending on the flame retardant, effects include reproductive, neurocognitive, and immune system impacts, among others. Safety data on newer flame retardants are still emerging and are often not complete, but early studies suggest there is reason to be concerned about the newer alternative chemicals on the market.

In the health care setting, flame retardants can be found in upholstered furniture, drapes, mattresses, foam positioners, infant incubator pads, operating room table pads, and electronic medical devices, among other products. The chemicals can escape from these products and wind up in the air and dust of health care facilities, and, ultimately, in the environment.

In 2013, Health Care Without Harm partnered with Zhuoyuan Chen and Dr. Heather Stapleton from Duke University to analyze dust samples from fifteen U.S. hospitals for the presence of flame retardants. The researchers found flame retardants in every sample, including two common flame retardant commercial mixtures at levels higher than those found in residential settings and two organophosphate flame retardants at the same level as residential settings. Multiple researchers have found relatively high levels of flame retardants in dust samples found in commercial buildings and residences.

Given the use of flame retardants in such a wide range of products, it is not surprising that Americans have the highest recorded levels of certain flame retardants in their blood compared to other countries. Alarming, levels in children are often significantly higher than in adults.

Health care institutions take very seriously the links between chemicals in the environment and rising rates of disease. They are committed to creating healing environments, free from products containing chemicals linked to chronic diseases. Although TB 117-2013 does not mandate the removal of flame retardants or the use of flame retardant-free materials in the production of upholstered furniture, health care institutions and other large organizations are increasingly demanding products that are free from flame retardants in order to reduce exposures through any feasible means.

Last year, Health Care Without Harm worked with leading health systems from across the country to demand safer furniture. Advocate Health Care, Beaumont Health System, Hackensack University Medical Center, Kaiser Permanente, and University Hospitals publicly announced that they would stop purchasing furniture treated with toxic flame retardant chemicals. Combined, these five health systems provide care for patients throughout Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Virginia, Maryland, Oregon, Washington, Ohio, and the District of Columbia. These health systems were able to make this commitment because the applicable flammability standards provide for an exemption from TB 133 (and the equivalent ASTM E-1537 and NFPA 266) for fully-sprinklered facilities.

On the basis of the health concerns associated with exposures to flame retardants, combined with the lack of data to demonstrate their need, these health systems concluded that eliminating the chemicals from their furniture reflected their commitment to patient safety.

About their commitment to eliminate flame retardants from furniture, the health systems had this to say:

Advocate Health Care: “Across our system, we are deeply committed to ensuring a healthy environment for our patients, staff, and surrounding communities,” said Albert L. Manshum, Vice

President, Facilities & Construction, Advocate Health Care. “Achieving fire safety without the use of toxic flame retardants is of paramount importance to us.”

About Advocate Health Care

The largest health system in Illinois and one of the largest health care providers in the Midwest, [Advocate Health Care](#) operates more than 250 sites of care and was named as one of the nation’s Top 5 largest health systems based on quality.

Beaumont Health System: “We are continuously looking for better ways to improve the quality of the environment for the patients, visitors and the community we serve,” said Kay Winokur, vice president, Quality & Professional Services and Green Team Administrator, Beaumont Health System. “With the leadership and support of Beaumont’s more than 700 person Green Team, we are able to provide a healthy and comfortable setting by supporting and implementing flame retardant-free furniture in our hospitals and outpatient centers.”

About Beaumont Health System

[Beaumont Health System](#) is a three-hospital regional health system with 1,778 licensed beds, more than 20,200 employees and 3,100 physicians, including 553 Beaumont Medical Group physicians and more than 2,500 private-practice physicians. Beaumont, Royal Oak is the No. 1 hospital in Michigan with 10 national medical specialty rankings by U.S. News & World Report. It is also recognized as a Top Ten Quality Leader by the University HealthSystem Consortium.

Hackensack University Medical Center: “As a member of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative, we look to provide meaningful change that will inspire others in the healthcare industry to value sustainability,” said Robert C. Garrett, president and CEO, Hackensack University Health Network. “This commitment to providing a safe environment for the hundreds of thousands of patients that we see annually is what motivates our organization to continue being a part of this important national health care initiative.”

About Hackensack University Medical Center

[Hackensack University Medical Center](#), the flagship hospital of the Hackensack University Health Network, is the largest provider of inpatient and outpatient services in New Jersey and the fourth largest hospital in the nation based on admissions. A 900-bed non-profit, research, and teaching hospital, HUMC was ranked the number one hospital in New Jersey and the third Best Hospital in the New York metro area by U.S. News & World Report.

Kaiser Permanente: “Where there is credible evidence that a material might result in harm to the environment or public health, we work to replace it with safer alternatives,” said Kathy Gerwig, vice president of employee safety, health and wellness, and Kaiser Permanente’s environmental stewardship officer. “At Kaiser Permanente, we believe through our practices we can help promote the creation and adoption of safer chemicals and sustainable materials in a way that supports a healthy economy, healthy environment, and healthy people.”

About Kaiser Permanente: Founded in 1945, Kaiser Permanente is one of the nation's largest not-for-profit health plans, serving 10.1 million members in 38 hospitals and 619 medical offices across eight states and the District of Columbia.

University Hospitals: "Through our purchasing and operating practices, we at University Hospitals believe we can help to promote the development of safer chemicals and more sustainable materials for use in healthcare and beyond, fostering a healthier environment for all," said Aparna Bole, MD, manager of sustainability, University Hospitals, and pediatrician at UH Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital. "We are proud to join Health Care Without Harm and other hospitals systems around the country in taking an important step toward this goal, by committing to purchase furniture free of flame retardant chemicals as our regulations and statutes allow."

About University Hospitals

[University Hospitals](#), the second largest employer in Northeast Ohio with 25,000 employees, serves the needs of patients through an integrated network of 12 hospitals, 26 outpatient centers, and primary care physician offices in 15 counties. At the core of our \$3.5 billion health system is University Hospitals Case Medical Center, ranked among America's 50 best hospitals by U.S. News & World Report in all 12 methodology-ranked specialties.

Boston is alone in requiring furniture located in fully-sprinklered public spaces to meet TB 133, yet the data do not suggest that there is something unique about the city to warrant this requirement. Indeed, the state of Massachusetts recently adopted TB 117-2013 for public spaces with automatic sprinkler systems.

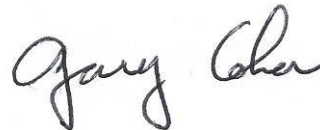
We strongly support an update to the Boston Fire Prevention Code to reflect today's understanding of the safest approach to fire prevention and to reduce unnecessary and harmful exposures to flame retardants. Such a move would bring Boston's fire code into alignment with the state of Massachusetts and the rest of the country.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



Rachel Gibson, JD, MPP
Director, Safer Chemicals Program



Gary Cohen
President and Co-Founder