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The Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MIAAP) supports phasing out the use of deca-BDE, a type of flame retardant used in the manufacture of plastics, textiles and foam products.

The MIAAP is a diverse group of over 1,700 pediatricians. Our members have a long history of activities that promote the health and well being of children in the state of Michigan. As health care providers, parents and citizens, we care about the safety, health and development of children. The issues concerning deca and other flame-retardants are at the intersection of concerns about fire safety for children and the adverse health effects of toxic chemicals.

Deca is a member of a family of halogenated flame retardant chemicals; specifically it is a polybrominated diethyl ether (PBDE). PBDE's are added in the manufacturing process of plastics, fabrics or foam padding to reduce the flammability of computers, upholstered furniture, appliances and other products. They can be released from these manufactured items. Research indicates that we may be exposed to PBDE's through our diet (especially fish but also other meats, milk, fruits and possibly plastic containers), household air, household dust or certain jobs (e.g. recycling of PBDE containing products).

Chemically, PBDE's have low water solubility and accumulate in fatty tissues. They persist and bioaccumulate in the environment because they are poorly biodegradable. The amounts of PBDE's have been increasing in the Great Lakes and worldwide and have been measured in air, water, soil and wildlife. In addition, they have been measured in human samples of blood, fat, and breast milk and are highest among people in the U.S. and Canada.

We are concerned about potential adverse health effects, particularly in developing children. PBDE's are similar in structure to PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyls), which were banned in the 1970's because of concern that they caused developmental problems in children. In animal studies, exposure to PBDE's was associated with problems in learning, memory, behavior, thyroid and immune function.

There are alternatives for these halogenated flame-retardants. The only U.S. manufacturer of two forms of PBDE's—penta and octa—voluntarily phased them out in 2005. Many major electronics manufacturers have switched to safer alternatives (Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Phillips, Sony). There are effective and non-bioaccumulative fire retardants already on the market to replace deca for other uses as well.

We can join others who are moving forward in this area. In May 2007, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality draft report recommended support for a legislative ban on deca-BDE, contingent on the availability of a safe alternative, which now exists for furniture, mattresses, TVs, computers and other product classes. Maine and Washington State banned the manufacture and sale of deca in 2007 for certain product categories, and many states, including Michigan, have passed bans of penta and octa-BDE. Several other states and countries are considering limitations on deca-BDE.

Therefore, the MIAAP supports phasing out all forms of PBDE's through legislative action. We urge our state legislature to act on behalf of Michigan's children.

Submitted on behalf of MIAAP

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