

California may change rules for fire retardants

By David Siders, Sacramento Bee

Gov. Jerry Brown urged state regulators this week to reduce the prevalence of chemical flame retardants in household furniture, joining a growing number of critics who argue the chemicals are toxic and unnecessary.

“Toxic flame retardants are found in everything from high chairs to couches and a growing body of evidence suggests that these chemicals harm human health and the environment,” the Democratic governor said in a prepared statement. “We must find better ways to meet fire safety standards by reducing and eliminating – wherever possible – dangerous chemicals.”

The directive follows the defeat last year of legislation that would have let furniture manufacturers avoid using chemical flame retardants in their products by providing an alternative test for meeting state fire prevention standards.

Opponents of the legislation, including the chemical industry-backed Citizens for Fire Safety Institute, said the bill would increase the risk of fire and weaken safety standards they characterize as among the strongest in the United States.

On Monday, the group issued a statement saying its members “welcome any public stakeholder review process of such an important issue.”

The author of last year’s failed bill, Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, said Brown’s intervention “definitely shifts the debate.”

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