

Row over fire-safety 'threat'

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ONE OF Scotland's leading science academics has launched a withering attack on the environment group WWF, claiming a campaign to eradicate flame-retardant chemicals from consumer products "could endanger lives rather than save them".

Professor Anthony Trewavas, a microbiologist at the University of Edinburgh, warns that if WWF succeeds in its campaign to regulate and restrict the use of chemicals used in household furnishings, families and children will be placed at much greater risk, with more household fires likely to result in an increase in deaths and disfigurements.

In a report obtained by *The Scotsman* written by Prof Trewavas and to be published in the journal *Chemistry and Industry*, he reveals: "With the sensitivity of instrumentation now available to chemists, anything that humans come into contact with - no matter how small - becomes detectable.

"Brominated fire retardants may cause disturbance to the thyroid, but only at concentrations about one million fold higher than human consumption."

He adds that chemical compounds known as phthalates, commonly used in plastic, would have to be absorbed at concentrations 100,000 times higher than normal human consumption to cause harm.

Richard Dixon, head of policy at WWF Scotland, claimed Prof Trewavas was "deliberately misinterpreting" the purpose of the campaign.

"We are absolutely not saying that flame retardants should be ruled out," he said. "One of the biggest proofs that something can be done about this serious problem is evidenced by IKEA. Any piece of furniture bought from them will not have a brominated flame retardant content. It does have flame retardants, but not those which we are concerned about. This demonstrates that one of the biggest furniture retailers in the world has taken this issue seriously."