



3 December 2007

Consumers Put at Risk by Greenpeace Campaign

The international environmental group Greenpeace is targeting electronics manufacturers that use brominated flame retardants in their products to prevent them from catching fire, despite the significant fire danger those products can pose if they overheat.

In a recent update of its report *Guide to Greener Electronics*, Greenpeace attacked several major electronics producers for not moving fast enough to reduce their use of certain chemicals, including flame retardants.

However, the substances Greenpeace seeks to eliminate are all approved for use, and provide critical performance and safety functions in a wide range of electronic products.

Among the substances attacked by Greenpeace are brominated flame retardants (BFRs), which are commonly used in electronics to provide a high level fire safety. In certain applications, they are the most effective, efficient products available.

Preventing fires in electronics is particularly important, as they often contain heat sources and significant amounts of highly flammable plastics. Recent incidents with music players, computer batteries and game consoles bursting into flames illustrate the dangers.

In 2005, Microsoft, one of the companies under attack in the Greenpeace report, was forced to recall 14.1 million power cords for its Xbox game console because they were thought to be a fire hazard. The company reported that 30 customers reported fire damage, seven Xbox users suffered burned hands, and 23 reported other damages from fires.

In Europe and the US, thousands of people are killed every year as a result of domestic fires, many of which are started by or involve consumer electronics.

"It is critical that consumer electronics be fire safe, and brominated flame retardants are a very effective, proven way to provide that protection," said Michael Spiegelstein, chairman of the Bromine Science and Environmental Forum. "It is irresponsible and dangerous for Greenpeace to simply propose eliminating these products without proposing equally safe and proven replacements."

BSEF is the international organisation of the bromine chemical industry, whose remit is to inform stakeholders and commission science on brominated chemicals such as flame retardants.



For example, two types of brominated flame retardants commonly used in electronic devices are TBBPA and Deca-BDE.

TBBPA is widely used in electronics, especially in printed circuit boards, due to its effectiveness, reliability and safety with respect to the environment and to human health. A recent, extensive risk assessment conducted by the European Union concluded that TBBPA is safe for continued use and presents no health risk.

Deca-BDE is used to protect the plastic components of electronic devices from the risks of fire. Deca-BDE has also been thoroughly evaluated under an EU risk assessment, which concluded that it did not present any risk to human health or to the environment under current conditions of manufacturing and use.

-ENDS-

|

BSEF is the international organisation of the bromine chemical industry, whose remit is to inform stakeholders and commission science on brominated chemicals such as flame retardants.