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Greenpeace's campaign against brominated flame retardants continues to ignore fire safety for electronic products

Ignoring the significant fire danger that electronic products can pose if they overheat, the international environmental group Greenpeace has stepped up its campaign against electronics manufacturers that use brominated flame retardants (BFRs) to provide fire-safe consumer electronics.

Greenpeace wants to force the major electronic manufacturers – and their customers – to stop using the best scientifically documented flame retardants, which have been proven to be safe from an environmental and human health point of view, disregarding experts' conclusions and competent authorities' decisions.

In a recent update of its report *Guide to Greener Electronics*, Greenpeace announces that it will toughen its demands on electronic manufacturers regarding BFRs. The NGO will now insist that companies eliminate the whole range of brominated compounds used as flame retardants (more than 75 different substances) in consumers electronics. These represent the main solution selected by the market to fulfill the fire safety standards in electronic goods.

In doing so, Greenpeace continues to ignore the following facts:

- The vast majority of the substances it seeks to eliminate have been approved for use by the competent authorities in Europe and in North America;
- The biggest brominated compounds in terms of volume (Deca-BDE and TBBPA) have been thoroughly tested and have been through environmental and human health risk assessments procedures, notably in the EU, which concluded positively on their continued safe use;
- These products provide critical performance and safety functions in a wide range of electronic products. In certain applications, they are the most effective, efficient products available.

If they bow to the Greenpeace requirements, electronics manufacturers will be forced to use less-tested chemicals, since they cannot simply offer their customers products that are not fire resistant – and thereby put them at risk. BSEF urges electronics manufacturers to act responsibly by using well known and approved compounds.

Preventing fires in electronics is particularly important, since they usually contain heat sources and significant quantities 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 damage from fire.

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. “We continue to think that Greenpeace acts irresponsibly by simply proposing the deselection of substances which have been thoroughly tested and cleared for use by international regulators.”

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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.