

Consumers put at risk by Greenpeace's campaign against brominated flame retardants in electronics

European consumers are being put at risk of being injured or killed by fire as a result of Greenpeace's campaign against brominated flame retardants (BFRs) in electronics, says the bromine industry's science and environment forum.

Ignoring the significant fire danger that electronic products can pose if they overheat, the international environmental group has once again stepped up pressure on electronics manufacturers that use brominated flame retardants to provide fire-safe consumer electronics.

With the publication of its new report "Playing dirty", Greenpeace is aiming to force the major game console manufacturers – and their customers – to stop using the best tested and scientifically documented flame retardants, which have been proven to be safe from an environmental and human health point of view, disregarding European experts' conclusions and competent authorities' decisions.

Greenpeace's new report continues to ignore the following basic facts:

- The vast majority of the substances it seeks to eliminate have been approved for use by the competent authorities in Europe and 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 that they are completely safe to use; the health concerns which are at the core of Greenpeace's allegations against the brominated flame retardants used in game consoles are scientifically baseless
- These flame retardants provide critical performance and safety functions in a wide range of electronic products. In certain applications, they are the most effective, efficient products available to meet fire safety standards.

If they submit to Greenpeace's demands, electronics manufacturers will be forced to use less-tested chemicals, since they cannot simply offer their customers products that are not fire resistant – and in so doing put them at risk. BSEF urges electronics manufacturers to act responsibly by continuing to use well known and approved compounds.

Preventing fires in electronics is particularly important, since they almost all 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 essential that consumer electronics are fire safe. Brominated flame retardants are a very effective, proven way to provide that protection – and they have also been categorically proved to be safe for human health and the natural environment," said Michael Spiegelstein, chairman of the Bromine Science and Environmental Forum. "Greenpeace is acting irresponsibly by simply campaigning to ban some of the best scientifically tested and approved flame retardants."

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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.