

26 November 2003

**WWF-UK Report Indicates Life-Saving Flame Retardant Deca-BDE Not a Health Risk****Statement:**

A WWF-UK biomonitoring study<sup>1</sup> finds Deca-BDE in only 7% of the total samples which demonstrates that Deca-BDE is not found widespread in humans, as claimed by WWF-UK, and confirms limited exposure from Deca-BDE.

Following eight years of an EU Risk Assessment of Deca-BDE<sup>2</sup>, several studies have been evaluated which found similar concentration levels and concluded there is no risk from these levels for human health.

After 8 years of independent scientific study under the EU risk assessment, Deca-BDE is the flame retardant chemical with the most data supporting its use and is actually compatible with the requirements under the newly proposed EU chemicals policy – REACH.

Below is our response to typical questions we receive on such studies:

**Why is Deca-BDE used?**

Deca-BDE is used in textiles so that upholstered furniture can meet the UK and Irish fire safety standards. These standards have resulted in over 3,000 lives being saved in 10 years according to UK government calculations<sup>3</sup>. Other European countries limit their fire safety requirements to furniture in public places, such as cinemas, theatres, hospitals, trains and buses.

**Is Deca-BDE likely to pose a risk to human health?**

Deca-BDE is the flame retardant chemical with the most scientific data supporting its use following 8 years of scientific study under an EU scientific assessment. The draft EU risk assessment conclusions indicate that Deca-BDE poses an acceptably low risk for the environment and human health. A recent survey of existing scientific studies by the Institute of Occupational Medicine found that consumer and worker exposure is “extremely small” and “the risk of adverse health effects arising from these exposures is negligible”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n\\_0000001055.asp](http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n_0000001055.asp)

<sup>2</sup> <http://ecb.jrc.it/existing-chemicals/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dti.gov.uk/homesafetynetwork/bs\\_rfffr.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/homesafetynetwork/bs_rfffr.htm)

<sup>4</sup> “Review of the potential human exposure to decaBDE and the associated risks to health”, Institute of Occupational Medicine, 2003.

## What should be done?

The industry welcomes monitoring reports that provide additional data in order to enable a scientific assessment of levels of risk for the environment and human health. The industry has itself initiated extensive environmental monitoring reports from leading independent scientists and is committed to follow up with further monitoring. On this basis, emission reductions have already been achieved by industry. We commit to achieve further environmental emission reductions of Deca-BDE and to measure and publish emissions data from household furniture.

## What are the implications of WWF-UK's findings?

Based on this evidence, a ban of Deca-BDE, as called for by WWF, would imply that any chemical found in biota or the environment should be banned no matter the level found. This would be the end of modern society as we know it. The public has a right to be informed as to the chemical substances they encounter in their daily lives, whether this is when going into a cinema or hospital or walking along a busy high street. The public also have a right to expect high levels of fire safety. It is to be hoped that this WWF campaign will not discourage product manufacturers from using flame retardants, hence increasing the real threat to public safety (and the environment) from fire.

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Notes to editors:

1. EBFRIP, the European Brominated Flame Retardant Industry Panel is composed of the major manufacturers of brominated flame retardants for the European market: Albemarle, Dead Sea Bromine Group and Great Lakes Chem. Corp.

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