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Presence of certain fire retardants in the Arctic addressed by EU action and Industry Emission Reduction Programme

A WWF paper issued in advance of the REACH debate and indicating the presence of certain brominated flame retardants (BFRs) in the Arctic¹, mainly relates to the flame retardant Penta-BDE, which has been phased-out in the EU since August 2004 and by industry at worldwide level since 2005.

BSEF recognizes the concerns related to the presence of low levels of Penta-BDE in the Arctic. However scientific evidence² indicates that levels are decreasing Europe's following the introduction of a phase-out of Penta-BDE. In North America, the phase-out was a year later and a decline is to be expected as well in the coming years.

The paper incorrectly suggests that little is known about the effects of BFRs whereas all the commercial PBDEs (Penta-BDE, Octa-BDE and Deca-BDE) have completed full EU risk assessments analysing potential effects on health and the environment, and other BFRs are undergoing similar EU risk assessments.

Findings -detected at very low levels- could suggest that the ocean currents are capable of carrying substances from their place of use or production elsewhere in the European Union to the Arctic. The brominated flame retardant industry is proactively addressing these environmental findings through a voluntary programme initiated two years ago to reduce emissions to the environment from manufacturing facilities in Europe³.

Brominated flame retardants enable a wide range of materials to meet fire safety standards in the home and public places across the Europe Union.

¹ 'Killing them softly....Health effects in arctic wildlife linked to chemical exposures', June 2006

² "Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) in Swedish human milk. The follow-up study.", D. Meironyte Guvenius and K. NOren, BFR 2001 proceedings (2001) 303-305

³ For further details on this programme, please download our annual progress report at:
http://www.bsef.com/newsmanager/uploads/2006_vecap_annual_progress_report.pdf