



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS®

HAROLD A. SCHAITBERGER
General President

VINCENT J. BOLLON
General Secretary-Treasurer

January 22, 2008

LeRoy A. Wilkison, President
Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland
PO Box 68
25896 Miles Haven Road
Newcomb, MD 21653-0068

Dear Brother Wilkison:

The International Association of Fire Fighters, headquartered in Ottawa, Ontario and Washington, DC, represents more than 286,000 full-time professional fire fighters and paramedics. More than 3,100 affiliates and their members protect communities in United States and Canada. There are over 6,500 IAFF members in the state of Maryland. Our union is concerned about health and safety of our members as well as the health and safety of all our citizens. Accordingly, the IAFF believes that the passage of legislation banning brominated flame retardants (Polybrominated diphenylethers (PBDEs) including Penta-, Octa-, and Deca-BDEs) is a step in the right direction for improving the health and safety of our fire fighters and the citizens who are exposed to these

One of the primary applications of PBDEs is as a flame retardant applied onto or in many common household goods (furniture foam; plastic cabinets; computers and small appliance; consumer electronics; wire insulation; and back coatings for draperies and upholstery) to reduce and retard the amount of flame spread. While these chemicals inhibit the formation and spread of flames, they do not completely prevent fires. Unlike other flame retardants, when PBDEs burn they release dense fumes and black smoke that reduce visibility and a highly corrosive gas known as hydrogen bromide. In addition, PBDEs produce highly toxic byproducts of incomplete combustion. Although use of flame retardants saves lives and property, there have been unintended consequences. There is evidence that PBDEs persist in the environment and accumulate in living organisms, as well as toxicological testing that indicates these chemicals may cause liver toxicity, thyroid toxicity, and neurodevelopmental toxicity. Many studies involving fire fighters exposed to these and other toxic gases during active fire fighting, overhaul, and long term exposure from these chemicals penetrating protective gear, have found that fire fighters have a much greater risk of contracting cancer, heart and lung disease, and other debilitating diseases. While we support the concept of flame retardant chemicals, there are alternatives that do not contain bromine or chlorine and are much safer for fire fighters than PBDEs.

The IAFF joins with the Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland in support of HB 1 which seeks to stop the use of brominated flame retardants and requires the use safer alternative fire retardants. We also salute those companies, such as Dell, Hewlett-Packard and Ikea, that have demonstrated that alternative flame-retardant technologies for achieving fire safety standards do exist and are readily available for other manufactured products.

Sincerely

Richard M. Duffy, Assistant the General President
Occupational Health, Safety and Medicine

cc: William Taylor, IAFF District Vice President