



Office for Product  
Safety & Standards

## New Approach ...to the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations



### Issue 3

1/4

May 2021

### News & links for professionals in regulation

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### Key Activities since January 2021

We are pleased to report on the following key activities since our last newsletter, published on 22 January 2021:

1. We provided an update to the UK Chemicals Stakeholder Forum on 10 February;
2. We emailed all stakeholders providing an opportunity to be involved in COP 26;
3. Research examining existing literature into the risks associated with flammability and exposure to chemicals of upholstered furniture products has been commissioned following a successful open tender competition. The research findings will supplement the existing evidence basis that will be used to inform the scope of the new regulations.

### BSI FW/6 Furniture Committee

Mr. Steve Owen has stepped down as Chair of the FW/6 committee on flammability performance and fire tests for furniture. We would like to thank him for his hard work over many years. Mr. Owen has been succeeded by Mr. Phil Reynolds as the Acting Chair, and we welcome him to the role until the Chair is appointed.

Sarah Horsfield, Standards Development Manager at BSI, explains more about the work of BSI and the standards development process:

*"BSI is appointed by the UK Government as the National Standards Body and represents UK interests in international standardization. Its role is to help improve the quality and safety of products, services and systems by enabling the creation of standards and encouraging their use. BSI publishes over 2,700 standards annually, underpinned by a collaborative approach, engaging with industry experts, government bodies, trade associations, businesses of all sizes and consumers to develop standards that reflect good business practice.*

*"BSI's FW/6 Fire performance and fire test for furniture committee is responsible for the development and maintenance of British Standards relating to the flammability of furniture, and is currently preparing for the development of standards as a consequence of the current review of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 (the FFRs) being carried out by BEIS/OPSS. We welcome all applications to join the committee and we strive to have a balance of stakeholder views around the table, so our standards-makers might be individual experts of all ages and backgrounds, seasoned professionals, industry innovators or those at the vanguard of their field, the change-makers,*

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*nominated representatives of government, professional bodies and academia or representatives of charities and public interest groups.”*

For further information about BSI's standards work programme and current membership, see its 'Standards Development' website for FW/6:

<https://standardsdevelopment.bsigroup.com/committees/50001727>

To contact BSI please email its Customer Services Department:  
[cservices@bsigroup.com](mailto:cservices@bsigroup.com)

### UK Product Safety Review: Call for Evidence

The Office for Product Safety and Standards is undertaking a review of the UK's product safety regime to ensure that only safe products can be legally placed on the market, now and in the future, and to enable innovation. You are invited to share your views on the UK's product safety regulations. This is a real opportunity to input into the reform of the entire product safety framework, within which the FFRs play a part. Have your say! For further information and to participate, please go to: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/uk-product-safety-review-call-for-evidence>.

### Stakeholder Spotlights

What our stakeholders think about the policy.

**Mr Kasturirangan Kannah - Director, Product Advocacy, LANXESS**

#### **What is your interest to date in the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations?**

My involvement in the UK FFRs started around 2008 when I joined Chemtura (since acquired by LANXESS), a manufacturer of polymer additives including flame retardants. On behalf of LANXESS, I have contributed to two Public Consultations in 2014 and 2016 and have also given evidence at the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry on "Toxic chemicals in everyday life", in which the FFRs took centre stage.

I understand that the genesis of the Regs. can be traced back to the Woolworths fire in Manchester in 1979 which claimed 10 lives. This tragedy gave rise to an intensive campaign led by the fire services, who were alarmed by the lethality of foam filled furniture. The data shows that the FFRs and associated British Standards are the world's benchmark for furniture fire safety and I am happy to contribute to their review.

#### **What do you see as the main challenges and positives to revising the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) regulations?**

The FFRs have worked well due to their precise requirements, well understood by all in the value chain, ensuring traceability and compliance. The challenge as we move towards the "new approach" on product safety is to maintain this precision, particularly as it pertains to flammability. Currently there is a close interplay between the FFRs and the underlying standards, principally BS 5852. In supplanting the FFRs with the ESRs, we should ensure that fire safety protections are not diminished and critically, that we achieve the policy outcome of "maintaining or improving fire safety".

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It is noteworthy that in the US, a disturbing rise in fire fatality rates is emerging after the long-standing California standard TB 117 was modified.

One positive I can see emerging is that the FFRs and standards would have benefited from a thorough and timely review.

#### **What is the main issue that you would like to see come out of the regulation?**

The FFRs owe much of their success to flame retardants, yet there is a lack of appreciation of their use. We as chemical manufacturers have an obligation to ensure that no harm is caused by our products and we stand fully behind this duty. Our chemistries are vetted and regulated to be safe and fit for purpose, as defined under REACH. As such, I would like to see a better understanding emerge of the nature of flame retardants and their function as well as their risks and benefits.

#### **IKEA of Sweden**

#### **What is your interest to date in the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) regulation?**

At IKEA, our vision is “to create a better everyday life for the many people.” With over 75 years of experience in home furnishing, we’ve learned a lot about life at home and balancing the needs of people and planet. When we create a product, we consider the customer’s safety throughout the entire process – from raw materials to finished design. Sharing our knowledge and exchanging information is an important part of our process.

IKEA has been in the UK since 1987, and today have 21 stores welcoming millions of customers each year. We want to play a constructive and collaborative role in the regulatory process to bring our expertise into the discussion to benefit UK customers and the environment.

#### **What do you see as the main challenges and positives to revising the regulations?**

IKEA welcomes this important discussion. We want to ensure that legislation and requirements in all markets keep pace with the research and expertise from fire, health and environmental communities.

We are always striving to make things better by making better things. To achieve that, every product IKEA develops must meet all five dimensions of what we call Democratic Design - that includes great form and function, good quality, built with a high focus on sustainability and at an affordable price. Taking the IKEA Democratic Design mindset, we must ensure that our various agendas enable one another to find the best solution.

For example, when addressing fire safety, we can’t do it at the expense of health and environmental. And when considering health and environmental needs, we must also look for ways to mitigate fire risks. And when working on product development, we need to understand how this agenda fits into our company transformation toward a circular and climate positive business.

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We need to consider and plan for how all our products – from the very beginning of design – can be made to last for many lives. In this context, IKEA takes an “and” approach over an “either/or” approach.

We aim to:

- Eliminate harmful chemical flame retardants, and
- Increase fire safety in our upholstered products and mattresses, and
- Enable circular capabilities in all of our products.

Finding the right balance will be both a challenge and an opportunity in revising the regulations. Still, we think it is possible and necessary.

#### **What is the main issue that you would like to see come out of the regulation?**

We welcome the UK Government attention on revising the fire safety regulation. At IKEA, we believe safety can only be achieved through continuous improvement. So much new information has been learned over the past years about fire safety and the impact of chemicals on people’s health and the environment.

Our focus is on securing a high level of fire safety in our products and refraining from the use of chemicals and substances that can be harmful to people and the environment. It’s not easy, but we need to address the complexity head on. IKEA will continue to invest in research and new technologies to help us move forward on this issue. And we can’t do this alone, so we look forward to working with the UK Government and all stakeholders to find the best regulatory solution.

**If you’d like to feature in the Stakeholder Spotlight section of one of our upcoming newsletters, and to be added to our newsletter mailing list, please email: [furniturefire.safety@beis.gov.uk](mailto:furniturefire.safety@beis.gov.uk)**

**Making regulation work**