

FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS (FIRE)(SAFETY) REGULATIONS 1988

Consultation on proposed amendments to Schedule 5 – the Match Test – Part 1
and Schedule 4 – the Cigarette Test

Response on behalf of the South West (SWERCOTS) Regional Safety Group, by

Redacted

Question 1: Do you think this proposal will achieve its aims of: helping to make UK furniture greener, save money to industry and making UK furniture more fire safe?

The SWERCOTS Safety Group agrees with BIS that the proposal should help to reduce the environmental impact of upholstered furniture and reduce the risk to consumers from exposure to brominated flame retardants used to meet the requirements of the current regime. The way in which these break down over time and create an exposure hazard and environmental harm is still not fully known and therefore a reduction in their use is ultimately desirable.

The current regime is somewhat piecemeal in its approach to what is and what is not tested. The extension of the regulated parts of upholstered furniture is again desirable as this reflects the real world risks associated with combustion, and will ultimately reduce the risk of harm to consumers.

The SWERCOTS Safety Group also agrees with the modification of the requirement to Cigarette Test after the Match Test has been passed, as this has been demonstrated by experience to be a redundant test which presented unnecessary expense to compliant producers.

Questions 2: Do you think that paragraphs 19-2 accurately set out the need for a change to the current match test?

The SWERCOTS Safety Group agree that this change has been scientifically justified.

Question 3: Do you think the proposed changes are viable (paragraphs 23-29)?

The new match test requirements are a positive move both in terms of ease of testing and also reflect more accurately the real world risk presented by the furniture when it is being tested.

Question 4: What are your views on the inclusion of currently unregulated materials (paragraphs 27-29)?

The SWERCOTS Safety Group believes this is a positive move as it more adequately reflects a risk based model of flammability assessment and compliance, since experience has shown that currently unregulated materials within 40mm of the surface of the product have the potential to contribute to combustion.

Question 5: Do you agree with the benefits BIS believes the changes will bring?

The SWERCOTS Safety Group agrees with the consultation documents assertions about the benefits of the change in the testing requirements.

Question 6: What is your view on BIS's reasons for bringing forward the changes (paragraphs 41-42)?

SWERCOTS agree.

Question 7: General rating of the proposals.

The SWERCOTS Safety Group think that the proposals are good, but too much emphasis is placed on cost savings for the industry. The benefits for consumers and the environment are more important and we think should have been emphasised more in the proposals.

Question 8: Do you have any other comments that might aid the consultation process as a whole?

Whilst the proposals will have tangible benefits to consumers, businesses and the environment the Group believes that it does not fully address the risk profile of combustible products which are used with or in the same environment as upholstered furniture, such as bedding, duvets and throws. In addition the risk profile has changed with respect to smokers' materials which are now much less likely to be the source of combustion for upholstery, and hot batteries and hair care products, particularly on beds and bedding may be a more realistic test, even including potential failure modes for charging batteries.

Traceability is the key to enforcement of these regulations due to testing costs and therefore highly skilled regular and risk based auditing of supply chains and internal production control documents for overseas producers will be necessary. The resource implications of officer time, training and skills necessary to carry out this task to ensure adequate and consistent enforcement need to be addressed at a local, regional and national level.