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Consumer attitudes to fire safety information on furniture

Testing alternative labelling approaches for
soft furnishings with consumers

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Executive Summary

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) commissioned IFF Research to explore consumers' awareness and attitudes to fire safety in relation to soft furnishings, and test potential designs for new fire safety labels with consumers. The research specifically aims to understand how consumers engage with fire safety information on soft furnishings and ensure that any new fire safety labelling that is introduced is understandable and informative. The research also sought to explore consumer attitudes and behaviours around the disposal of soft furnishings. To achieve this, IFF Research consulted key stakeholders in the furniture and fire safety industry and conducted a series of focus groups with 85 participants from across the UK. A qualitative approach was taken in order to explore the nuances of consumer attitudes to furniture fire safety, and to allow a detailed exploration of what consumers would like furniture fire safety labels to be like in future.

Though fire safety labels are used to convey information to other audiences in addition to consumers, such as waste disposal specialists, this was outside of the scope of this research, which instead focuses on the part of the label aimed at the consumer.

Throughout this report, the term 'soft furnishings' refers to: furniture intended for private use in a dwelling, including children's furniture; beds, head-boards of beds, mattresses; sofa-beds, futons and other convertibles; nursery furniture; garden furniture which is suitable for use in a dwelling; furniture in new caravans; scatter cushions and seat pads; pillows, and loose and stretch covers for furniture.

Overall, there was low engagement with the topic of fire safety: participants tended to assume all products for sale in the UK are 'safe', and that they can trust reputable retailers to have carried out adequate checks to ensure their products meet fire safety standards. Most participants had therefore not considered fire safety when shopping most recently for furniture as they considered all soft furnishings to have appropriate fire safety precautions with little to no variation. Other factors that were considered to have greater variation such as price and comfort were more influential in their purchasing decision. In addition, participants perceived the risk of fire to be very low and unlikely to happen to them (nobody taking part in the focus groups had personally experienced a fire).

Awareness and understanding of flame-retardant chemicals ('FRCs') among participants was very limited. Consequently, they did not generally consider whether flame-retardant chemicals have been used at point of sale. Only a handful of participants recollected any information related to use of chemicals on soft furnishings: either via vague recollections of seeing something on TV or through their professional capacity. There was little consideration of the impact of flame-retardant chemicals on human health and the environment.

For most participants, recollection of fire safety information at point of sale was limited to the display label (attached to all new soft furnishings in a visible location at the point of sale) and in particular the visual elements of it. Very few participants had engaged with the current permanent label (sewn into the soft furnishings in such a way that it will stay attached to the item and remain visible if the furniture is subsequently sold second hand). When shown an example of an existing permanent label during the focus groups, participants felt it was overly wordy and they were unclear as to which parts of the text were meant for them to read. This had led them to feel that they might not pay attention to the label if they were shopping.

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Participants felt that clear, simple visuals, including icons, would work best to convey information, with any text kept as concise as possible.

When shown potential designs for future labels, listing specific chemicals or chemical groupings on the label did not appeal to participants and the majority felt they would be unlikely to look any of these chemicals up. Directions to additional information on the label is seen as a 'nice to have' for participants that wanted to find out more, but participants thought it unrealistic that they would seek further information.

Like the permanent labels currently used in the UK, the furniture label currently used in the State of California is seen as overly wordy, but participants do prefer those elements which they felt communicated the information at a glance, such as tick boxes indicating whether the material contained added FRCs. Some appreciated the explicit health warning about FRCs and felt that, should the chemicals be known to have a detrimental effect on human health, it was imperative to flag this to consumers (either on the label or through more prominent channels, given that they would be unlikely to read the label in any depth). At the same time, participants queried why chemicals were being used if there was a possibility that they are harmful.

Participants viewed naturally flame-retardant materials (materials which are flame retardant without the use of chemical treatment, such as wool) as a positive development; however they would be unlikely to choose this if it comes at an additional expense.

Participants felt that any information meant for consumers should be clearly separated from that aimed at other audiences (in a way that the participants think is not achieved by current labels). Given that they are not reading display or permanent labels in any depth, as they do not see it as necessary information, it is unlikely that a re-design of the label(s) in and of itself will have an impact on consumer behaviour.

Background and methodology

Introduction

The Furniture and Furnishings Fire Safety Regulations 1988 (as amended) were introduced to help reduce the risks of injury or loss of life through fires in the home spread by soft furnishings. The regulations include fire resistance requirements for new and second-hand soft furnishings which aim to ensure safety in relation to accidental ignition from sources such as a match or cigarette. The regulations also set out labelling requirements.

Soft furnishing items currently have fire safety labels attached which confirm their compliance with test requirements, as set out in the regulations, and provide other information such as on traceability and descriptions of materials used. Soft furnishings will have a short or long permanent label as well as a display label, and these are used to convey information to both consumers at and after the point of sale and to specialist organisations at other points in the furniture lifecycle, such as at disposal.

Flame-retardant chemicals ('FRCs') are added to combustible materials, typically including the fabric/upholstery of soft furnishings, to prevent and slow the spread of fire. Currently there are no legal requirements to provide information on the label regarding the use of such chemicals. However, concerns have recently been raised by news outlets regarding potential health and environmental impacts from the use of certain FRCs in soft furnishings. This has also led to calls both to explore and increase the use of less toxic alternatives, including naturally flame retardant materials (materials which are flame retardant without the use of chemical treatment, such as wool).

Research Objectives

By commissioning IFF Research to conduct this research, OPSS wanted to understand consumer awareness and recollection of fire safety information in relation to soft furnishings and their attitudes towards this, as well as to test designs for alternative furniture fire safety labels. Any future label design needs to better communicate:

- To consumers, which soft furnishings contain FRCs, and which are made of naturally flame-retardant materials; so that they can make better-informed purchasing decisions; and
- To waste disposal specialists, so that they can apply the correct means of disposing of items.

While the label needs to work for both audiences, this research focused only on the consumer perspective.

Methodology

OPSS commissioned IFF Research to conduct a qualitative study to explore current attitudes and behaviour among consumers purchasing items of soft furnishings and upholstery.

The study consisted of two phases:

- An initial evidence gathering phase in which researchers from IFF carried out desk research and consulted key stakeholders from the furniture and fire safety industry.
- 12 focus groups with 85 participants across the UK, split by socio-economic group. All participants had shopped for soft furnishings in the last two years.

Initial evidence gathering phase

As part of the initial evidence gathering phase, IFF conducted desk research followed by stakeholder interviews.

Desk research was undertaken to review the current regulations and information requirements, to explore what is available on the market currently in terms of soft furnishings using naturally flame retardant material and the associated labels, and to compare regulations and labels used abroad and in other sectors. The following sources were consulted:

- The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988

The current regulations included detail on the information required by law on labels and illustrations of the fire safety labels currently in use on soft furnishings.

- Fire safety of furniture and furnishings in the home: A Guide to the UK Regulations (FIRA, 2009)
- Updating the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988: Government response to consultation (OPSS, 2019)

The recent consultation provided a guide as to how labels might be changed in future to engage consumers and comply with regulations.

- Upholstered furniture: flame retardant chemicals (California Legislative Information, 2013-14)
- Technical bulletin 117-2013: Requirements, Test Procedure and Apparatus for Testing the Smolder Resistance of Materials Used in Upholstered Furniture (State of California Department of Consumer Affairs, 2013)
- Label examples: Law, Flammability/FR Chemical Statement and Combined Labels (State of California Department of Consumer Affairs, 2015)

The state of California was identified as having revised guidance around the labelling required for giving information on chemical flame retardants use in soft furnishings. This guidance requires manufacturers to provide certain information on labels around the use of FRCs, including a stipulation that many flame retardants are known to, or strongly suspected of, adversely impacting human health or development.

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- Fire Safety Advice Centre
- Cottonsafe® website
- Silentnight website

The two companies above were identified as currently selling soft furnishings which do not use chemical flame retardants. The websites were examined to see how such products were being marketed and to obtain images of the labels in use on these products. The websites both used terminology such as 'natural', 'eco-friendly' and 'sustainable' to describe mattresses which had been made with naturally flame-retardant material.

- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) labelling for biocidal products

Labelling requirements from other sectors were examined for ideas of approaches for the 'future labels' stimulus, such as the requirement for the identity of every active substance and its concentration, and any risks related to specific nanomaterials, to be included on the label of biocidal products.

- DEFRA labelling for food allergens¹

The consultation on labelling for allergens, undertaken by DEFRA, was examined for ideas of approaches for the 'future labels' stimulus. For example, labels on pre-packed food must list ingredients, including known allergens. There are also mandatory requirements on how the information should be presented, including on the size of font.

This literature review informed both the development of the topic guide and the stimulus used in the focus groups. For the 'current labels' stimulus (see Annex E), pictures of labels currently used on soft furnishings in the UK were selected, while for the 'future labels' stimulus, a selection of pictures were taken from the State of California website and the websites of the retailers selling naturally flame retardant soft furnishings, as well as examples of icons from other sectors.

Stakeholder interviews were also carried out to explore potential designs for new fire safety labels. Stakeholders were consulted as to how they would like to see fire safety information evolve, with regard to the particular information labels need to convey to the various audiences who use them.

The following stakeholders participated:

- DEFRA
- National Bed Federation
- British Furniture Manufacturers Association
- Furniture Industry Research
- Baby Product Association
- Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers

¹ Full references for these sources can be found in the Annex.

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- Fretwork
- Flame Retardants Europe

These organisations were selected and agreed to participate given the key role they play in furniture and/or fire safety from a regulatory, manufacturing, disposal or retail perspective.

Involving stakeholders at this stage ensured that the content of the consumer focus groups considered key priorities and concerns of those in the sector. Some stakeholders were concerned about balancing the needs of waste disposal experts, to know which FRCs have been used, against the level of detail potentially desired by the consumer. Others spoke of the logistics of upholsterers and furniture-makers accessing information about the chemicals used, while some questioned the extent to which the system can be 'future proofed' as the list of chemicals deemed harmful changes on an ongoing basis. These discussions helped to ensure that the labels developed as stimuli were realistic and useful in a professional capacity.

Second evidence gathering phase - consumer focus groups

This phase of the research aimed to understand consumer attitudes and reported current behaviour in relation to fire safety when purchasing soft furnishings, as well as to test alternative labelling approaches.

A qualitative approach was taken in order to explore the nuances of consumer attitudes to furniture fire safety, and to allow a detailed exploration of what consumers would like furniture fire safety labels to be like in future. The group dynamic allowed for participants to build on each other's feedback and engage in more in-depth discussion on a niche topic than might not otherwise have been possible in individual interviews.

Evidence in this report is therefore based on participants' reported behaviour. There can be some risk of participants responding to a group dynamic by agreeing with the sentiment of the first opinion expressed however, several mitigations were put in place to overcome this. With an experienced moderator leading each group, participants were reassured that their contributions would be anonymous and there was no right or wrong answer, and the discussion guide was designed to elicit honest and detailed feedback. Due to the small sample size, findings in this report should not be interpreted as conclusions of a statistically representative sample, and are instead illustrative of qualitative research in that they explore a range of attitudes and opinions.

The focus groups first explored participants 'top of mind' recollection of furniture fire safety labels and other information relating to fire safety, as well as the use of flame retardant chemicals in the treatment of soft furnishings. Participants were then prompted with the use of photographic examples of current UK labels to support more detailed discussion of the format and content of the information. Finally, they were presented with stimuli of potential future label ideas (developed from discussions with stakeholders and based on overseas examples), to stimulate further feedback on consumer preferences for the content and format of information provided on labels in future.

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Fieldwork took place in October 2019.

The groups were carried out in London, Newcastle, Manchester, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast and were organised by socio-economic group.

Table 1: Focus groups

Location	Socio-Economic Grade 2
London	AB
	D
Manchester	AB
	C1
Newcastle	E
	C1
Belfast	C2
	E
Cardiff	C1
	D
Edinburgh	C2
	AB

Participants were free-found by Criteria, a specialist qualitative market research recruitment agency, using an agreed recruitment questionnaire to ensure the research was explained consistently and participants met the relevant screening criteria.

All participants had shopped for soft furnishings or upholstered furniture in the past two years, either in-store or online.

² Information about the social grade classifications can be found in Annex A

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Each of the groups contained a mix of participants by age, gender, ethnicity, level of education and life-stage. There was a mix of both home-owners and renters, and people living in rural as well as urban locations (while the discussion groups were all held in city centre locations, venues were near transport links and parking options to allow respondents living rurally to access them easily).

More detail on the 85 participants who took part in the research can be found in the annex.

A note on the terminology used in the report

This report refers to 'soft furnishings' throughout. This refers to: furniture intended for private use in a dwelling, including children's furniture; beds, head-boards of beds, mattresses; sofa-beds, futons and other convertibles; nursery furniture; garden furniture which is suitable for use in a dwelling; furniture in new caravans; scatter cushions and seat pads; pillows, and loose and stretch covers for furniture

A note on the analysis presented in the report

We have set out differences in views expressed by demographic groups where it has been possible to distinguish these but, unless otherwise stated, there were no observable variations between different participants.

Attitudes and current behaviour

This chapter explores consumer attitudes to the issue of fire safety, recollection of fire safety information at their last purchase, and consumers' information needs.

Current purchasing behaviour

Overall, participants reported the decision-making process when purchasing soft furnishings being - perhaps unsurprisingly - more complex for 'larger ticket' items, such as sofas or beds, compared to cheaper, smaller items, such as cushions or throws. There was a clear correlation between the amount of money involved in a purchase and the time that participants invested in the decision-making process. Among participants living with others, the number of people involved in the decision also increased with higher cost purchases. A few participants mentioned visiting stores alone and then sending images to partners to get their opinion before purchasing.

The majority of participants used a mix of both online and in-store, with in-store generally favoured for larger investments. There was a preference for shopping online for lower cost items, such as pillows and blankets; this was due to the relative ease of purchasing online and a feeling that lower cost items did not need to be seen in person to purchase.

"I buy quite a lot of stuff online just because of the ease of it, to be honest. The fact that you can get it delivered straight in." (Cardiff, C1)

For larger items, several people reported shopping around online for reviews and saving screenshots, then going to a shop to make the purchase. There was one notable exception: several participants reported having recently purchased mattresses online due to free delivery and money-back schemes, such as those offered by new mattress brands: Emma, Casper, Eve and others.

Participants typically shopped around several stores to do their in-store testing. They felt that shopping in a store was important for most high price pieces of soft furnishing. This allows them to test out the furniture in person, for example by lying on a mattress or sitting on a sofa, as well as seeing the colour or texture of the fabric used.

"You can't always tell online, the quality of the fabric or the colour." (Newcastle, E)

Impulse purchases such as pillows or throws were often made in-store without the same degree of consideration.

It was common for participants to purchase soft furnishings second-hand. Many participants used charity shops, Gumtree and Facebook Marketplace to do this. Cost was often reported as a reason for shopping second-hand. This was reported both in terms of 'finding a bargain' for an item that was not considered important by more affluent participants or out of necessity for those in lower socio-economic groups.

"Sometimes I'm struggling with money, so what I do is a look online. Facebook, now, I mainly like that." (Cardiff, D)

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There was near consensus on which items were acceptable to buy second-hand and which were not. Wooden furniture such as bed frames and dining tables were common second-hand purchases, with nearly all participants reporting an experience of buying such items at some point. With soft furnishings, most were comfortable with the idea of buying a sofa or cushions second hand, but had reservations about second-hand mattresses, largely related to hygiene reasons.

"F: I would be a bit funny about buying a second-hand mattress. I don't know how I feel about that, but things like rugs or cushions, I would be quite happy about it.

M: Maybe I would consider a couch, but not a bed.

Moderator: Why do you say that, a couch but not a bed?

M: Hygiene, and things like that.

F: If I had to buy second-hand where a bed was concerned, that mattress would be cleaned before I slept on it."

(Conversation between participants, Edinburgh, AB)

There was also a tendency to spend less browsing time and money on items which are not for their own everyday use. For example, multiple participants mentioned spending less money on items for guest bedrooms, or for occasional-use furniture like sofa beds.

Recollection of fire safety information

Price, comfort, texture, design and fitting in a room were all deemed to be important factors influencing purchasing decisions when buying soft furnishings. Nearly all participants considered fire safety to be important but – relatively speaking – a much less influential factor, when making their purchasing decision.

"You just take it for granted that everything should be a specific standard. I don't really think about it." (Newcastle C1)

It was assumed that all soft furnishings on sale in the UK have already been tested for fire safety and therefore participants did not consider this as a differentiating factor at point of sale.

M: You just assume that everything's regulated behind your back and you don't have to worry about it.

M: Yes. You hardly put any thought into that whatsoever. All you need to focus on is the price, the comfort, the durability.

F: The manufacturer takes care of the rest of it.

(Conversation between participants, Edinburgh, AB)

A minority of participants said that fire safety is not included as a consideration in their final purchasing decision at all.

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“If I really like it, it’s not a deal breaker if it’s not there. I know it sounds bad saying it out loud. If I really like something, I wouldn’t not buy it because of the fire safety.” (Cardiff, D)

Recollection of fire safety information when making their most recent purchase was therefore very limited. Only a handful looked for the label or for fire safety information in general at point of sale, with just one participant saying that it was paramount in their buying decision. For this particular consumer, their experience in the fire brigade meant they had extensive knowledge of fire safety and they were therefore more aware of fire safety on a day-to-day basis than others in the group.

“I look not just at prettiness and softness, but I also look at the safety aspect for the surface spread of flame.” (Newcastle, E)

The minority who had considered fire safety in their purchasing decision often put this down to having children and therefore being more conscious of safety overall.

“If you asked me five years ago, I’d say no I don’t care, I’ll just buy anything. If you ask me now, say the last two years or so, I think its just growing up and having children.” (Cardiff, D)

Despite not seeking information about fire safety, around half recollected seeing something related to fire safety at point of purchase – however, recollections were usually vague and limited to an icon from the display label.

“There’s usually a triangular sort of thing attached to it with something crossed out on it to say it’s fire resistant or something.” (Edinburgh, AB)

A few others had noticed both a display label and a sewn-in fire safety label on their soft furnishings since purchase. Overall, there was some confusion in the focus groups over the difference between permanent and display labels and some were not aware there were two types of labels in the first place.

Awareness of flame-retardant chemicals (FRCs)

In the focus groups there was low consumer awareness of flame-retardant chemicals (FRCs). The majority of people participating in the research knew very little (if anything) about FRCs.

Where people did recollect something about FRCs, this was usually from having seen something on TV: either a news story, an advertisement, or a fire safety campaign. For example, a couple of individuals recollected having seen various news stories about FRCs, including one incident of chemicals being used on leather sofas and causing an allergic reaction.

“A couple of years ago, they had to recall all the settees because there was something wrong with them. It was bringing kids out in a rash. I don’t know what it was.” (Belfast, E)

Two people recollected an advert or fire safety video, which they assumed was from the fire brigade, about what happens when soft furnishings had been treated with flame-retardant chemicals compared with (presumably) untreated material.

“I watched a thing on the television once and they set alight one sofa which went completely out of control very quickly, and set alight another sofa which it contained it for a lot longer than the other one, but I can’t remember what they had treated it with.” (Edinburgh, AB)

There was a couple of isolated instances where people were more informed about FRCs due to their professional responsibilities. This included someone who had worked in the fire brigade and someone who worked for a large retailer. The participant who had worked in a large furniture retailer had been trained to understand the use of FRCs in soft furnishings.

Mostly participants had no idea whether their own soft furnishings were treated with FRCs or not. Among some, there was an assumption that ‘something had been done’ to make furniture fire retardant. However, few participants expressed considered views on the topic of FRCs in relation to soft furnishings, suggesting that it was rare for the issue to have been thought about prior to the focus groups.

Some participants were relatively well informed regarding the use of chemicals (both harmful and otherwise) in relation to other products – such as clothing, cosmetics or food. Some of this was due to proactively seeking further information on the topic; for example participants in the London group spoke about looking at the ingredients used in cosmetics to check that they were natural. There was general agreement that people would prefer natural ingredients in products that would be used on their skin. Others had seen stories relating to the use of chemicals in other contexts being shared through word of mouth or social media. For example, numerous participants recollected news coverage regarding chemicals used in fabric to make childrens’ Halloween costumes which had resulted in the costumes becoming extremely flammable³.

This had the effect of leading participants to avoid buying certain things which they believed contained ‘chemicals’ they wanted to avoid, or had, in the case of cosmetics, lead people to become more active in checking the ingredients for chemicals before purchasing. For most participants this behaviour did not extend to their soft furnishings.

Attitudes towards flame-retardant chemicals (FRCs)

Once the concept of soft furnishings being treated with FRCs was introduced during the group discussion, participants acknowledged the benefit of FRCs being used to prevent and slow the spread of fire. However, when asked whether they had any concerns, downsides of using FRCs were identified by participants in all of the focus groups. Participant responses varied as to what worried them most.

Their concerns generally centred around whether the chemicals were safe for human health. A few thought it might be worrying if someone had allergies and the item was consistently in close proximity (e.g. a mattress). Other worries regarding health included asthma and the impact of breathing FRCs in, as well as a few worries about skin irritation. A small handful of participants also spontaneously expressed concerns about chemicals being carcinogenic.

³ It should be noted that the warning reports at the time were not couched in terms of chemicals used in the manufacture of the fabric that made them flammable, it was simply the fabric of which the costumes were made that is flammable.

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Those participants who were more engaged with the topic of chemicals in other products were more likely to express concern about FRCs. They felt that they should perhaps have the same considerations as with cosmetics, given that furniture material is also used next to skin.

Pet owners also expressed concerns about the impact of the chemicals on their pets – for example, whether their pet could ingest dangerous chemicals through chewing the sofa.

There was a couple of people in each group who were concerned about the potential environment impact of FRCs, but this was much less common.

“I never thought of when it’s being disposed of what’s happening then. These chemicals are ending up God knows where.” (Edinburgh, AB)

It remains the case that those who expressed concern about FRCs regard it as lower priority than factors such as price, style and comfort when purchasing soft furnishings.

Participants assumed they would have heard more about FRCs if they were hazardous to human health.

“They’d be called out by now, as they’ve been using the retardant chemicals for a number of years, so, you’d think if there was going to be a reaction, it would have started affecting kids already.” (Belfast, E)

Naturally flame-retardant material

The majority of participants had never heard of naturally flame-retardant materials.

There was a couple of notable exceptions, however, where participants had been informed by sales assistants when making a recent purchase.

“I didn’t know about it until I was buying my sofa and it just happened that the sofa I was buying was made of that material, because I was toying between two, and obviously, because I was asking the questions about fire, the girl was able to turn around and say to me, ‘Well, that one is actually natural.’” (Belfast, E)

Most were positive about the idea of naturally flame-retardant materials, and felt that having ‘natural’ materials would probably be preferable to materials treated with chemicals. Largely this was for health reasons; for example, that it would be more gentle next to your skin. Some also made the connection that naturally flame-retardant material would be better for the environment when it comes to disposal of the furniture item.

However, participants also queried whether the natural materials would come with a price increase. Most people assumed that naturally flame-retardant material would be significantly more expensive, and this prompted a sense of unfairness, particularly where consumers felt they were being priced out of something that would be ‘better’ (in that it might be less likely to be harmful to human health).

“My budget restraints probably wouldn’t allow me that luxury to buy a couch that was nicer but £700 or £800 or £1,000 more because it was naturally flame retardant and not sprayed with chemicals.” (Edinburgh, C2)

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For some people, this then engendered a feeling that the government should intervene to ensure that pricing structures were fair.

“I think it should be made affordable, because it’s our right, isn’t it, to have something that’s good.” (Cardiff, D)

Even where participants had identified specific benefits of naturally flame-retardant materials, price remained more important in their purchasing decisions.

“If it’s a case of [it costing] hundreds [more], then, yes, the environment can just take another hit.” (Belfast, E)

Some also questioned whether naturally flame-retardant materials were of the same quality and therefore as fire safe as those treated with FRCs. For example, in one group, participants suggested the connotations of natural meant something was more likely to burn, and they were unsure how a product could be made from naturally fire retardant materials. When reassured of the safety of naturally flame-retardant materials, these participants were led to ask why FRCs are being used, if a naturally flame-retardant material is equally effective.

Consumer needs for information about furniture labels

The near consensus across all the groups was that they simply needed to know that the item of soft furnishings was ‘sufficiently safe’ – i.e. that it was fire retardant and would not go up into flames immediately (although they accepted any soft furnishings would burn eventually).

Information needs beyond this were limited as they acknowledged they would be unlikely to engage with the topic in much depth.

“My first thought is, it’s just really boring and I don’t care about it. I wouldn’t read it, despite our conversation.” (Cardiff, C1)

For most, the lack of engagement came from a feeling that they would be unlikely to experience a fire in their homes.

“I think that’s our mind set, ‘Right, okay, that’s fine but I like that couch, my couch is going to be fine. I’m not going to fall asleep on the couch. I’m not going to have a house fire’. I just think it’s not going to happen.” (Edinburgh, C2)

Fire safety information felt particularly irrelevant for participants who did not smoke (or did not smoke indoors) as this was assumed to be the most likely cause of an accidental housefire involving soft furnishings. It should be noted that none of the consumers taking part in the research focus groups had personally experienced a fire incident in their own home.

Most also placed trust in retailers to have performed adequate checks and therefore disengaged with the subject.

“If you’re buying it directly from a reputable store, or a branded-name store, I would expect as standard that everything in that store has been checked to the highest level and is safe for consumers. I wouldn’t go in and start picking their brains.” (Edinburgh, C2)

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There were a couple of notable exceptions in terms of consumer information needs. Where participants had bought products online from a retailer overseas (e.g. buying an item from Amazon which would be shipped from another country), they might read about the item a little more carefully. There was an assumption that they could not simply assume the item met UK standards in these situations. Based on this, participants suggested they may be more likely to read fire safety information if buying an item of soft furnishings from an overseas retailer, although none of the participants had previously done this.

When participants were asked to consider what information might be useful prior to the in-depth discussion about flame retardant chemicals, some suggested it would be useful to know how long it would take before an item caught fire. It was slightly less common for participants to want to know whether any toxic fumes might be released and less common still to want information about the impact of using cleaning products on fire-retardant materials or whether the efficacy of flame-retardant materials deteriorated over time.

However, it is important to note that another common response to this question was to request information about degrees of fire safety. There was an (erroneous) assumption that the fire retardancy of an item would directly correlate with its price - and this was felt to be unfair. Future communications about fire safety may need to address that there is currently no such thing as 'degrees of fire safety'.

Very few participants spontaneously mentioned wanting to know whether the item of soft furnishings had been treated with FRCs.

"So, all we want to know is, is it fire resistant, or fire retardant or whatever. We don't really care how it gets there. Is it fire resistant?" (Belfast, C2)

Once participants had considered the issue of flame-retardant chemicals in more detail, they typically wanted reassurance that the item of soft furnishing was safe for human and/or pet health, and so wanted to know whether or not it had been treated by chemicals, especially if the chemicals were harmful. While some wanted to know whether any chemicals had been used, others only wanted this flagged if the chemical was harmful.

Some wanted to know how long the chemicals remained active for, and whether cleaning would affect the efficacy of the chemicals.

Participants felt that knowing whether an item is naturally fire retardant or not would not feature in their decision-making when purchasing an item of soft furnishings.

Removal of labels

Participants reported removing fire safety labels from their soft furnishings because they find them unsightly and do not realise the disposal implications. Many participants described removing the display labels as they did not find them aesthetically pleasing.

When reflecting on buying a new piece of furniture, thoughts of resale or disposal were not considered, so this did not stop participants removing the tags.

Awareness of implications of label removal often came from previous experiences of trying to resell or donate furniture without fire safe labels, then finding out this was not possible.

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“When I was going to give my sofas away to charity and apparently charity shops won’t take them unless it has a fire label thing on it.” (Cardiff, D)

This suggests that awareness needs to be raised around the disposal implications of removing the label.

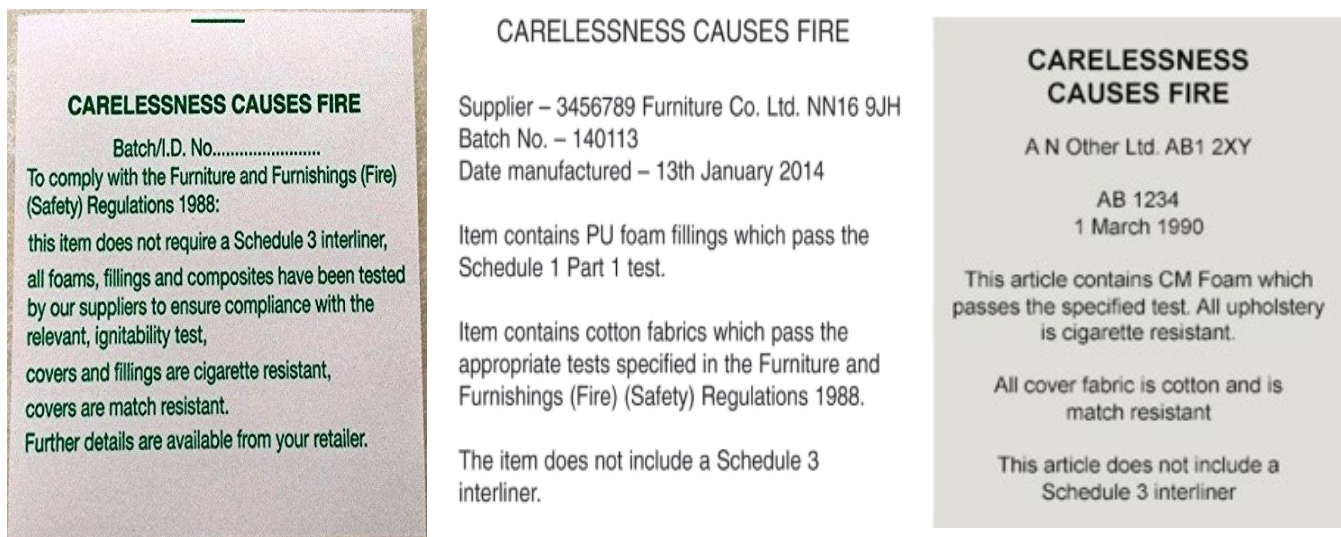
Redesigning fire safety labels for consumers

This chapter discusses responses among research participants to visual stimuli consisting of examples of current labels, as well as ideas for a possible re-design of fire safety labels.

Views on current labels

Participants in the focus groups were asked for their views on fire safety labels currently in use and were shown pictures giving examples of these as stimuli to prompt recollection and discussion. Participants were first shown examples of the permanent, sewn-in labels, labelled as Stimulus One below.

Stimulus One: examples of current permanent labels



Overall, participants thought the current labels contained too much text and felt that this deterred them from reading the information in any depth. Apart from the heading (“Carelessness causes fire”), participants could not recollect seeing any of the information prior to the focus group.

Participants assumed some of the information on the current label was intended for a non-consumer audience, as the terminology was perceived to be too complicated:

“You’ve got to be a scientist to understand that.” (Cardiff, D)

As an example, the term “Schedule 3 interliner” was not understood by anyone in the focus groups. Participants felt it was unclear which part of the label was directed at them and as a result did not read any of it.

Stimulus Two: Examples of current display labels



Participants were also shown examples of current display labels (shown above). The display labels were to a greater degree recognised by participants, particularly the visual elements, such as the cigarette and match icons. In all groups, the display label was the only label consumers could remember seeing at point of sale, if only vaguely. Participants appreciated the visual nature of these labels and felt the icons communicated the necessary information well. However, some suggested the icons may be outdated, as fewer people smoke indoors and consumers are therefore more likely to think the risk of fire does not apply to them:

"I'd probably look at that and think, 'don't smoke near the sofa'." (Belfast, C2)

Some suggested removing the cigarette icon, while others suggested replacing it with images of household items consumers are more likely to associate with fire safety, such as electrical equipment.

Designs for future labels

When asked for their initial reactions, participants said a new label should be highly visual, with simple text and easy to interpret symbols. They acknowledged that they are unlikely to read permanent labels in any depth and therefore felt that visual information, that could be understood at a glance, and only minimal amounts of text would work best.

Some participants compared these labels to laundry labels, which were seen to contain universally understood instructions. Others mentioned the recycling symbol, which was also perceived as universally recognised. These participants argued that a similar design would be needed to easily communicate whether a soft furnishing item had been treated with chemicals. Some spontaneously suggested that this could then be supplemented with a way to access to additional information for those that would be interested (but, when shown Stimulus Four during the discussion, most in the groups felt they personally would be unlikely to follow up on this additional information).

In order to explore possible designs for future labels further, participants were shown a stimulus containing ideas for such labels. This stimulus was created based on feedback from stakeholder interviews carried out during the scoping phase of this project.

Stimulus Three: Showing the names of chemicals or chemical groups used

This item contains the chemical flame retardants: decabromodiphenyl ethane, tetrabromobisphenol A , triphenyl phosphate and bisphenol A diphenyl phosphate.

This item contains brominated chemical flame retardants.

Participants were shown two examples, one listing the specific chemical flame retardants used in the treatment of soft furnishings, the other listing the chemicals used.

Overall, participants said they do not want to know the specific chemicals used. They felt the information was not accessible to a layperson and only a small minority said that they would look up the names of these chemicals if they appeared on the label:

“I think aimed at 99% of people, it would be lost because I think you would need a chemical degree to understand that.” (Newcastle, E)

While the full list of chemicals was described as “intimidating” and “scary” by some in the focus groups, the term brominated was not seen in this way. However, participants did not understand the term and said they are unlikely to search for more information about it. Listing the chemicals is therefore unlikely to be more valuable to consumers.

Stimulus Four: Signposting to additional information

Scan the QR code for more information about the item.



Directing consumers to additional information was spontaneously mentioned by several participants early on in several focus groups. While these participants themselves did not feel they needed more information about furniture fire safety, they suggested having this available for those that might be interested. Later on, participants were shown several ideas for ways to provide additional information and these included a bespoke app or website link, a QR code and a leaflet or product information booklet .

Participants were first asked for their views on a bespoke app or website which would contain up-to-date information about the FRCs used in soft furnishings, including a list of chemicals under review or known to pose a threat to human health or the environment. While a website was thought to be “nice to have” participants could not see themselves accessing this. Similarly, participants conveyed that they are highly unlikely to download an additional app.

“I’m not going to install an app for my furniture safety and then another app for my cleaning agents and then another....” (Edinburgh, AB)

A small minority said that they would download the app if it had a much broader remit:

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“If it was covering all the chemistry that’s involved with different products around my house, yes, I’d probably install that.” (Edinburgh, AB)

A few participants suggested that maintaining such a website or app would be a considerable investment, as the products available and research on FRCs would be constantly changing. These participants asked who would be responsible for keeping the resource updated and whether the information need among consumers was strong enough to warrant such an investment.

Views on QR codes as a method of providing additional information were mixed. Some suggested it was an easy and contemporary way to access additional information, but others were concerned it would be inaccessible to those without smartphones.

Respondent 1: “These codes are so easy to use. They’re so quick.”

Respondent 2: “But I’d then think of the likes of my mum, and my grandma.” (Belfast, E)

Few participants regularly used QR codes to access information, and even among those who were positive about the use of QR codes, most said they realistically would not use them in the context of furniture fire safety:

“90% of people might not bother, but the option’s there.” (Cardiff, C1)

A leaflet or product information booklet, to be handed out at point-of-sale was seen as relatively useful, especially for consumers who are less confident using the internet or mobile devices. Some participants said they tend to save product information booklets, although they acknowledged that they rarely, if ever, refer back to them. Others said that such leaflets easily get lost or thrown away.

Stimulus Five: State of California label

UNDER PENALTY OF LAW THIS TAG NOT TO BE REMOVED EXCEPT BY THE CONSUMER	NOTICE THIS ARTICLE MEETS THE FLAMMABILITY REQUIREMENTS OF CALIFORNIA BUREAU OF ELECTRONIC AND APPLIANCE REPAIR, HOME FURNISHINGS AND THERMAL INSULATION TECHNICAL BULLETIN 117-2013. CARE SHOULD BE EXERCISED NEAR OPEN FLAME OR WITH BURNING CIGARETTES.	THE UPHOLSTERY MATERIALS IN THIS PRODUCT: <input type="checkbox"/> CONTAIN ADDED FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CONTAIN NO ADDED FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS
ALL NEW MATERIAL consisting of POLYURETHANE FOAM...100%		THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA HAS UPDATED THE FLAMMABILITY STANDARD AND DETERMINED THAT THE FIRE SAFETY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS PRODUCT CAN BE MET WITHOUT ADDING FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS. THE STATE HAS IDENTIFIED MANY FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS AS BEING KNOWN TO, OR STRONGLY SUSPECTED OF, ADVERSELY IMPACTING HUMAN HEALTH OR DEVELOPMENT.
REG. NO. NC-3289 (MS)		
Certification is made by the manufacturer that the materials in this article are described in accordance with law.		
MADE FOR U.S. WORLDWIDE, INC 237-C Burgess Rd Greensboro, NC 27409		
DATE OF DELIVERY..... Finished Size:..... Net Weight of Filling Materials:..... MADE IN U.S.A.		

Participants were shown a picture of a furniture label currently used in the State of California. This label is different from the labels currently in use in the UK in that it specifies whether or not FRCs are used and in that it includes a statement about potential risks to human health and development from the use of these.

There were mixed responses to this label. The majority thought it contained too much text, and while participants assumed that parts of the text were not aimed at the consumer, they felt it

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was unclear which sections they should focus on. Some suggested using colour or text to highlight which section of the label consumers should read.

Although it was perceived as overly wordy, most participants in the focus groups felt this label was an improvement on the current labels used on soft furnishings in the UK. For example, participants generally liked the tick boxes but suggested more could be done to make these stand out, for example through colour coding using a traffic light system or symbols to make the layout clearer and direct attention to the relevant section.

“That’s a really good label and it’s got a lot of information on it, but just like that other label, I wasn’t actually reading it, so whether that’s a limit or not, I’m not sure.”(Edinburgh AB)

Some were positive about the health warning included on the label and felt it gave clear guidance from which consumers can make informed purchasing decisions. Others thought the warning was irrelevant as most consumers will not see the label in the first place. These participants felt this information should first be communicated through more prominent channels, such as a press release, a TV ad or posters on display in furniture stores.

Stimulus Six: Current labels conveying that an item is made with naturally flame-retardant materials



Participants were shown several ideas for symbols and icons that communicate that a piece of soft furnishings is made with naturally flame-retardant materials. Participants were positive about the use of more visuals and most found these labels and their symbols easy to understand and associated the symbols and language used with environmental causes. It was less common for participants to associate these symbols with health benefits.

“I think it’s eye-catching, and easier on the eye, and you’re drawn in quicker than reading.” (Belfast, E)

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While participants were positive about these labels and the idea of products using naturally flame-retardant materials more broadly, in almost all of the focus group discussions such products were assumed to be expensive and therefore inaccessible to most.

Some participants also wondered about the phrase 'naturally fire retardant' and whether these products are as safe as those using FRCs. They felt the label should contain reassurances that these products pass the same regulations as products using FRCs.

Stimulus Seven: Icons indicating that an item is made with naturally flame-retardant materials



Flame retardant without the use of any chemical treatments



Eco-friendly mattresses



Participants were often confused by the symbol containing interlinked circles and were not clear what it was trying to convey. Some suggested it looked like bubbles, others suggested coffee beans. It was unclear how this symbol related to fire safety or to the use of chemicals.

"Eco-friendly" was seen as a buzzword among participants in the focus groups and was not felt to mean much in this context. Some also thought it signified a more expensive or upscale product.

Participants were unclear what "breathable and clean" meant and the connection between the symbol and the text was not clear to all. As with the term "eco-friendly", some thought "breathable and clean" merely signified an upscale or expensive product and did not think it had a clear or scientific meaning.

The recycling symbol was understood by all and immediately recognised. However, as discussed previously in this report, disposal was not uppermost in participants' minds at point of sale, meaning they may be unlikely to think through the implications of the symbol for disposal when purchasing a new item of soft furnishings.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 12 focus groups carried out for this study, involving 85 participants:

- Consumers involved in the research do not currently read display or permanent labels in any depth, as it is not seen as necessary information. It is therefore unlikely that a re-design of the labels in and of itself will have an impact on consumer behaviour.
- Participants assume all products for sale in the UK are safe, both in terms of fire prevention and in terms of impacts on human health and the environment. For this reason, fire safety, and more specifically the use of FRCs in fire safety, are not considered by most at the point of sale. Participants expect that government regulations in this area are effective and therefore do not perceive a need for them to educate themselves on the matter of fire safety and FRCs on soft furnishings.
- Overall, recollection of furniture fire safety information is poor. Some remember seeing fire safety information at point of sale, but in nearly all cases this information came from the display label and in particular the visual elements of it. This suggests that currently display labels may be more effective than permanent labels in terms of communicating or drawing attention to fire safety.
- Current permanent labels are perceived by participants as overly wordy and some recommend a new design should be visual, with only minimal amounts of text. Participants also think that icons and colour coding can be used to draw consumers' attention to the information relevant to them.
- Participants in the focus groups were asked for their views on several ideas for a new label design. They suggest that listing specific chemicals is alienating to consumers and they are unlikely to look up any of these on the internet.
- Directing consumers to additional information is seen as a 'nice to have' but participants are unlikely to use this resource as the information need is not strong enough to justify searching for extra information. There were some questions around who would maintain such a resource, given the constant evolution of information on fire safety and FRCs.
- Naturally flame-retardant materials are seen as a positive development, but participants assume such products will be more expensive and the additional cost is not felt to be justified by the benefits of such materials.
- Participants were shown an example of the label currently in use in the State of California. Although this label is seen as too 'wordy', participants like the tick box clearing indicating the use of FRCs and some appreciate the explicit health warning. It was however suggested that such a health warning should be communicated through more prominent channels, as very few consumers are likely to read the product label in any depth.

Annex A: Social grade classification system

Social grade is a classification system based on occupation and is widely used in market research.

The classifications are as follows:

Social grade	Definition	% of population
A	Higher managerial, administrative and professional	4%
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative and professional	23%
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative and professional	28%
C2	Skilled manual workers	20%
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	15%
E	State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only	10%

Annex B: Desk research sources

The following sources were referred to as part of the desk research phase. Each source was accessed between September and October 2019.

Source	Definition
The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/822072/furniture-fire-regulations-2016-consultation-government-response-july-2019.pdf
Updating The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988: Government response to consultation (OPSS, 2019)	https://www.fira.co.uk/images/FIRA-Flammability-Guide-PDF-with-links.pdf
Fire safety of furniture and furnishings in the home: A Guide to the UK Regulations (FIRA, 2009)	http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1988/1324/contents/made
Upholstered furniture: flame retardant chemicals (California Legislative Information, 2013-14)	https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/TextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB1019
Technical bulletin 117-2013: Requirements, Test Procedure and Apparatus for Testing the Smolder Resistance of Materials Used in Upholstered Furniture (State of California Department of Consumer Affairs, 2013)	https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/TB_117_2013.pdf
Label examples: Law, Flammability/FR Chemical Statement and Combined Labels (State of California Department of Consumer Affairs, 2015)	https://bhgs.dca.ca.gov/industry/label_examples.pdf
Fire Safety Advice Centre	https://www.firesafe.org.uk/furniture-and-furnishings-fire-safety-regulations-19881989-and-1993/
Cottonsafe® website	https://www.cottonsafenaturalmattress.co.uk/
Silentnight website	https://www.silentnight.co.uk/?gclid=EAlaQobChMI2eHU48bL5AIVg7HtCh1LDA1-EAAYASAAEgKRZ_D_BwE&gclid=aw.ds
HSE labelling for biocidal products	http://www.hse.gov.uk/biocides/eu-bpr/packaging-labelling-requirements.htm

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DEFRA labelling for food allergens	https://consult.defra.gov.uk/agriculture/chain-directorate/consultation-on-amending-allergen-information/
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Annex C: Information about participants

The following table contains further information about the participants who took part in the research.

Gender	Female	42
	Male	43
Age	18-24	2
	25-34	20
	35-44	17
	45-54	21
	55-64	20
	65+	5
Homeowner status	Owners	48
	Renters	37
Urban/rural	Urban	47
	Suburban	5
	Rural	33
Ethnicity	White	68
	BAME	17
Highest level of educational attainment	Bachelor's degree or higher	27
	A-Level (or equivalent) or lower	58

Annex D: Discussion guide

Topic guide coverage: approx. 90 minutes

Introduction

Moderator to introduce themselves and the research.

- IFF – independent research agency, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society’s Code of Conduct
- Commissioned by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) to understand what consumers think about when buying new or second-hand furniture
- Introduce who OPSS are and what they do.
- Their aim is to make regulation work, in order to protect people and enable businesses to understand their obligations. They oversee the regulatory system for product safety and standards in the UK and are part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Their responsibilities include providing information to consumers to protect them from unsafe products, reporting the latest product safety updates, actions and recalls, and working to refine the legal framework that requires products to be safe.
- Confidential – can use first names when talking to each other; participants will not be identified in our report
- IF LONDON GROUP: Flag that there are some colleagues from the OPSS observing – they want to hear your views and experiences first-hand – there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers so please be candid; and it is fine to disagree with each other (respectfully!)
- Ask permission to audio record (IF LONDON: and video record) the focus group.
- GDPR info: Participation is entirely voluntary. We’ll keep your personal data for up to 12 months after the group. If you’d like a copy of your data, to change your data, for your data to be deleted or to lodge a complaint, then please follow the process outlined on our webpage: www.iffresearch.com/gdpr/

Background and warm up

Brief participants to pair up and talk to each other for a couple of minutes – the aim is to get them comfortable talking in the group environment. They should find out some key facts about the person next to them, then introduce them to the rest of the group:

- Their name and age
- Who they live with, what sort of property they live in (e.g. rent/own, flat/house)
- Most recent purchase made for house (doesn’t have to be soft furnishing), how they feel about it

Buying upholstered furniture

- What involvement do you generally have in making decisions about purchasing soft furnishings / upholstered furniture (such as beds and sofas)?

PROBE:

- Do you make these decisions with anyone else in your household?
- Does it vary depending on what sort of item you are buying?
- How do you tend to buy soft furnishings / upholstered furniture?

PROBE:

- In terms of channel? E.g. In-store vs. online vs. in a catalogue (or a combination – e.g. looking in-store then purchasing online)
- In terms of new vs not-new? E.g. Do you ever buy second-hand ('new' vs antique/vintage)? What about passing furniture items onto, or receiving them from, family members or friends? Why/why not? What situations/which types of furniture would this apply to?
- To what extent do you recall seeing furniture fire safety information when you were last purchasing a soft furnishing/upholstered or filled furniture item?

PROMPT:

- What do you recall about this? E.g. seeing any wording or symbols relating to whether the furniture item is fire-safe/meets regulations/anything else?
- How were you given this information? Do you recall any information on a display label on or near the furniture in store? Or information on the sewn-in label? Or being given information by a salesperson?

IF RECALL:

- To what extent did it influence your behaviour? In what way? Why did it make you react in that way?
- Is this the same for all items of soft furniture? (IF NOT SPONTANEOUS: nursery furniture vs rest of house)

IF BUY SECOND HAND:

- What information do you look for when buying second-hand?
- Do you look at the permanent fire safety label? Why? If you do, how does this affect your behaviour? Why did it make you react in that way?
- Were you aware that second-hand furniture must still have the original fire safety label attached?
- IF YES: how did you find out about this?

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- IF NO: would knowing this make you more likely to look for the label?
- Once you've purchased the item of furniture, do you ever refer back to the label? Do you ever remove it? Why?
- Is it clear enough why labels should be kept in position?
- Would the 'recyclability' / potential resale or reuse of furniture encourage you to keep labels intact? Moderator to explain that removing a label means the product cannot be recycled.
- How might labels need to change to make them less likely to remove them?

Attitudes to fire safety information

- How important is fire safety information to you when thinking about buying an item of upholstered furniture?
- How important is fire safety information compared to other factors when looking to buy a furniture item? (If not mentioned spontaneously then prompt: compared to the price of the furniture item? Or the design? Or brand? Or other factors?)
- Thinking about fire safety information specifically, what would you want to see?
- How might this change for different types of upholstered furniture? How might this change if (e.g.) buying online, vs. in-store vs. catalogue?

Views on fire retardant chemicals

Moderator to introduce fire retardant chemicals to the group: To stop the spread of fire and ensure that they meet fire safety regulations, furniture manufacturers often treat the material with flame retardant chemicals.

- Many people we've spoken to didn't know about chemical flame retardants before this study. Have you heard anything about them before?

PROBE

- Do you know if any of the furniture you have at home is treated with flame retardant chemicals?
- Have you heard anything in the news / read anything online?
- What implications do you think the furniture item being treated with FR chemicals has? Why do you think that?
- What do you think the benefits of using flame retardant chemicals are?
- What do you think the drawbacks of using flame retardant chemicals might be? (IF NOT SPONTANEOUS: any potential health impacts? Environmental impacts?)

Consumer Attitudes to Fire Safety Information on Furniture

- Would you ask about whether the item of furniture has been treated with flame retardant chemicals at point of sale (if buying in-store)? Or look for this information specifically when buying online? Why / why not?
- What would you want to know about, relating to the item of furniture being treated with fire retardant chemicals?

PROBE:

- Would you want to know which fire-retardant chemicals have been used? Why/ why not?
- What would be the best way of explaining whether the item has been treated with flame retardant chemicals to the person buying the item of furniture?
- Have you ever searched for chemical flame-retardant free ranges?

PROBE:

- Are there certain items or certain situations which would make you more likely to enquire whether FR chemicals are used on a product? (IF NOT SPONTANEOUS: E.g. allergy/new baby/etc)
- What do you think of the idea of a furniture item being made of natural flame-retardant materials?
- If you like it, what do you like about it?
- How might the idea of the furniture item being made of naturally flame-retardant material influence your behaviour? How likely would you be to seek this out over furniture that used FR chemicals? Why?
- Furniture which is naturally chemical flame retardant free is currently more expensive. What are your thoughts on this? Would you be happy to pay more for an item if it was free from chemical flame retardants?

Views on current labels (10 mins)

Activity One

Moderator to use the stimulus labelled 'Current labels' here – share with the group so that each pair has a copy of it in front of them.

REFER TO FIGURE 1 – 5:

Explain that the current labels document includes labels for furniture items which meet the current fire safety regulations and may have been treated with flame-retardant chemicals. NB. This stimulus contains permanent labels AND display labels – moderator to briefly explain difference i.e. that permanent labels are sewn in and should not be removed, whereas display labels are more prominent on the furniture item, are designed to draw attention to the fire safety info, and can be removed:

- 3 x sew-in permanent furniture labels (for armchairs, sofas, etc)

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- **2 x display furniture labels**
- **2 x sew-in permanent furniture labels (for mattress)**
- What do you think of these labels as they are currently? What do you like/dislike about them?

PROBE:

- What are your thoughts on the content? Is it clear, is there anything confusing or missing?
- What does the line 'meets/complies with the regulations/passes the specified tests' communicate to you? Why?
- If there is no mention of chemical flame retardants on a furniture fire safety label (but also no information about being naturally flame-retardant), what would you assume? Why?
- What are your thoughts on the presentation, and layout?
- Do the labels contain all the information you would like to know? Why/why not?

Moderator to explain that it is proposed that the display label be withdrawn in future.

- What are your thoughts on removing the temporary/display label?
- Would any of the information be helpful on the permanent label instead? Would this have any implications for you when shopping for furniture next?

Views on future labels

- I'd now like to show you a few ideas for new labels and to get your views on them. Before I do this, I'd just like to recap that certain parts of the label are unable to be changed, either because they are mandatory or because they are for other audiences, such as waste disposal specialists or Trading Standards. Some of the ordering of the information within the labels, can change, however.

Moderator to give high level summary of the elements on the label that are non-negotiable (i.e. the 'CARELESSNESS CAUSES FIRE' and 'DO NOT REMOVE THIS LABEL', the name, registered trade name (or trademark) and contact address of the manufacturer (and importer if applicable) a type, batch, serial or model number to enable identification of the product, and a declaration that the article complies with the essential safety requirements).

Moderator to explain that anticipated regulation changes may mean manufacturers have increased options to ensure fire safety and to reiterate, if needed, that this research is interested in what information is required from the perspective of the consumer.

Activity Two

Moderator to use the stimulus labelled 'Future label ideas' here to support the discussion – share with the group so that each pair has a copy of it in front of them.

Themes:

Listing out the specific chemicals/chemical groups

REFER TO FIGURE 6:

- What do you think of having a list of the specific chemical names which have been used cited on the label? Why?
- If listed, where do you think these should be written on the label?

REFER TO FIGURE 7:

- What do you think of having groups of chemicals cited on the label, rather than the actual names of the specific chemicals?
- If listed, where do you think these should be written on the label?

Providing links/ways of finding out further information

Moderator to explain: Rather than listing out any chemicals used, another option could be to supplement information on the label with a direction to the consumer about where they can go to look up further information. We have suggested a few ways here: e.g. a QR code, website, packaging, a leaflet or an app (e.g. there is an app developed by the European Chemical Agency which lets consumers look up what chemicals are in their products)

REFER TO FIGURE 8:

- Views on having instructions for where to go for more information on the label – which you would need to ‘look up’ to get further information on the full chemical name(s)
- Would you realistically look up further information?
- What would you be looking for? PROBE: for all chemicals used, or just whether a chemical is of ‘very high concern’?
- Which option, if any, do you prefer? Why?
- What about the wording suggested to go on the actual label? Is it useful to have the chemical ‘codes’ on the label or better to leave blank? Can you think of better/clearer ways to phrase it?

Showing if an item has been made of naturally flame-retardant vs has used chemicals

REFER TO FIGURE 9:

Moderator to explain that some items of furniture are already being produced using naturally flame-retardant materials – this is one example.

- What do they think about how this has been conveyed? Is the wording clear? What does the use of the word ‘naturally’ mean to them? Would they suggest any improvements?

REFER TO FIGURE 10:

Moderator to explain that, as an alternative, here are some suggestions (taken from retailers of other products on sale in the UK including soft furnishings) of wording and/or symbols, that could be used to communicate that a furniture item has not been treated with flame retardant chemicals.

- What are your thoughts on the terminology used?
- What does use of the word 'eco-friendly' mean to you? What would you assume about the product?
- What do you think of the idea of using symbols vs using text?

REFER TO FIGURE 11:

Moderator to explain that this is a label currently being used by the State of California.

- Thoughts on the general presentation? What about the tick boxes which have been used to indicate the product contains/doesn't contain added flame-retardant chemicals?
- Thoughts on the warning message – FR chemicals being linked to health / environmental risks? Do they read it? What would it make them think/do?

Moderator to wrap up activity:

- What do you think of these suggestions? What improvements can you think of?
- Do you have any other suggestions having looked through all these?

Wrap-up

Moderator to try and collect a final input from everyone

- What would make the greatest positive difference to your understanding of furniture fire safety information? Why do you say?
- Thank you for all your ideas this evening. Is there anything else you'd like to add, about what we've been discussing this evening?
- On behalf of IFF Research and the OPSS, thank you very much for your time.

Annex E: Stimulus

Current label stimulus



Figure 1: Example of permanent (sew-in) label for upholstery with limited information



Figure 2: Example of permanent (sew-in) label for upholstery with full information

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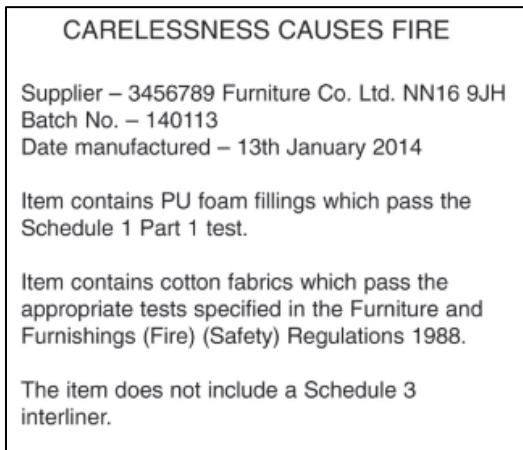


Figure 3: Second example of permanent (sew-in) label for upholstery showing full information

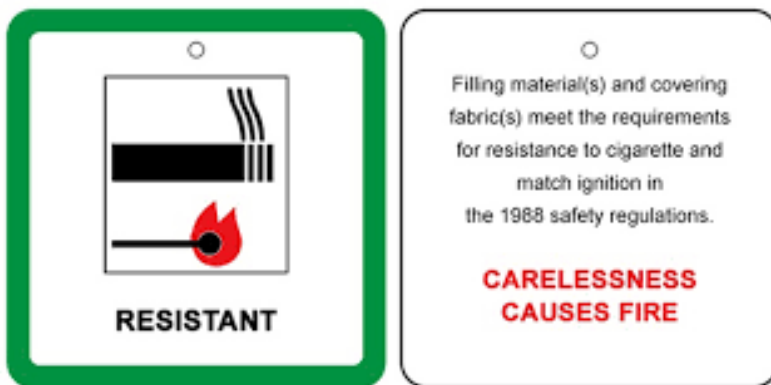


Figure 4: Display labelling for new furniture which meets the current requirements and is both cigarette and match resistant



Figure 5: Permanent (sew-in) label for mattresses to show they meet British Standard 7177 for low hazard (domestic use) and medium hazard (hospitals, hotels etc)

Future label stimulus

This item contains the chemical flame retardants decabromodiphenyl ethane, tetrabromobisphenol A , triphenyl phosphate and bisphenol A diphenyl phosphate.

Figure 6: Example of text to be included on the label which describes the full name of any chemicals used to treat the furniture item.

This item contains brominated chemical flame retardants.

Figure 7: Example of text to be included on the label which describes the chemical groups which have been used to treat the furniture item.

Scan the QR code for more information about the item.



BR, Q, L

For more information, go to: www.furniturefiresafety.com

BR, Q, L

For more information, see the accompanying leaflet.

BR, Q, L

For more information, see the product packaging.

BR, Q, L

For more information, please go to The Furniture Fire Safety app.

Figure 8: Example of a QR code which could be included on the label which could be scanned to take you to more information about whether any chemicals have been used to treat the furniture item (and which chemicals those are). Alternatively, more product information could be accessed through a website, app, leaflet or packaging.

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Figure 9: Example of a label used on mattress which does not contain flame retardant chemicals








 <p>FULLY RECYCLABLE No impact on landfills</p>	 <p>BREATHABLE & CLEAN MATERIALS Foam and FR chemical treatment free</p>	 <p>Flame retardant without the use of any chemical treatments</p>
 <p>Eco-friendly mattresses</p>	 <p>COTTONSAFE®</p> <p>This mattress contains NO Flame-Retardant chemicals and can be safely recycled.</p>  <p>NOTICE</p> <p>The materials in and on this mattress: Contain NO flame retardant chemicals or POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants)</p> <p>Cottonsafe® fabric conforms to BS 7177:2008 without ANY flame retardant chemicals.</p>  <p>Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs)</p>	

Figure 10: Examples of some symbols currently used by retailers on products for sale in the UK

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<p>UNDER PENALTY OF LAW THIS TAG NOT TO BE REMOVED EXCEPT BY THE CONSUMER</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">NOTICE</p> <p>THIS ARTICLE MEETS THE FLAMMABILITY REQUIREMENTS OF CALIFORNIA BUREAU OF ELECTRONIC AND APPLIANCE REPAIR, HOME FURNISHINGS AND THERMAL INSULATION TECHNICAL BULLETIN 117-2013. CARE SHOULD BE EXERCISED NEAR OPEN FLAME OR WITH BURNING CIGARETTES.</p>	<p>THE UPHOLSTERY MATERIALS IN THIS PRODUCT:</p>
<p>ALL NEW MATERIAL consisting of POLYURETHANE FOAM...100%</p>		<p><input type="checkbox"/> CONTAIN ADDED FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CONTAIN NO ADDED FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS</p>
<p>REG. NO. NC-3289 (MS)</p>		<p>THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA HAS UPDATED THE FLAMMABILITY STANDARD AND DETERMINED THAT THE FIRE SAFETY REQUIREMENTS FOR THIS PRODUCT CAN BE MET WITHOUT ADDING FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS. THE STATE HAS IDENTIFIED MANY FLAME RETARDANT CHEMICALS AS BEING KNOWN TO, OR STRONGLY SUSPECTED OF, ADVERSELY IMPACTING HUMAN HEALTH OR DEVELOPMENT.</p>
<p>Certification is made by the manufac- turer that the materials in this article are described in accordance with law.</p>		
<p>MADE FOR U.S. WORLDWIDE, INC 237-C Burgess Rd Greensboro, NC 27409</p>		
<p>DATE OF DELIVERY.....</p>		
<p>Finished Size..... Net Weight of Filling Materials.....</p>		
<p>MADE IN U.S.A.</p>		

Figure 11: Example of permanent label currently used in the state of California

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