

Press Release



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State Fire Marshals Renew Call for Fire-Safe Home Furniture As Fire Fighters, Survivors Join Demand for Flammability Standards

NASFM President Calls 10 U.S. Deaths per Week “Unnecessary and Preventable”

Washington, D.C.—Flanked by the State Fire Marshals of more than 10 states, as well as fire chiefs, firefighters and survivors of furniture fires, National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) President John Dean today renewed the call for enactment of effective national flammability standards for upholstered furniture. Fires originating in upholstered furniture account for 20% of all fire-related deaths each year in the United States and claim the lives of 10 people each week, according to data from the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).


“Many people don’t realize that the chairs and couches they relax on every day are a potential fire waiting to happen,” because of the flammable fabrics and filling materials often used in upholstered furniture, said Dean. “Without national furniture fire safety standards that address both cigarette and open flame ignitions, these preventable fires will continue to cause horrible deaths and injuries,” he noted.

The CPSC initiated a furniture flammability rulemaking in mid-1994, in response to a petition from NASFM. Yet the government is still studying the issue after more than a dozen years, thousands of deaths and injuries, and millions of dollars lost due to upholstered furniture fires, said Dean.

“Affordable technologies exist now to make upholstered furniture in the home safer,” Dean said. “What we need now is agreement around effective national standards, so that we can stop the unnecessary loss of life occurring each day across the U.S.” Dean invited the upholstered furniture industry to “let people come before profits” and join in serious discussions about the content of effective standards.

“Upholstered furniture is probably one of the most flammable items in the home,” explained Jonathan Riffe, a firefighter with the District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. Furniture fires “generate much more heat and much more thick, black smoke” than fires involving wood or paper. “The blacker the smoke, the more toxic and deadly it is to the people inside the dwelling,” as well as to the firefighters responding to the fire. “A standard could increase safety for everybody,” added Riffe.

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“For a few dollars more, we can prevent fires and, more important, prevent serious injuries and scars that last for lifetimes,” said Dave Borowski, a burn survivor and Executive Director of the Flicker of Hope Foundation, which advocates for the burn survivor community and provides educational scholarships for burn survivors.

California is currently the only state in the U.S. with fire safety regulations for upholstered furniture sold for use in the home. Following the adoption of those regulations in the 1970s, fatality rates fell by more than 25% in California, according to the California Bureau of Home Furnishings. National flammability standards for cigarette and open flame ignitions could take advantage of technological advancements since the California standards were enacted, said Dean.

While urging progress on a national flammability standard, Dean also asked that Americans follow simple safety tips that will help them keep their homes safe from upholstered furniture fires. For example, Dean recommended that consumers buy upholstered furniture that meets California’s Technical Bulletin 117 fire safety standard, and reminded them to keep candles, cigarettes, and other lighted materials away from upholstered furniture and all other combustible materials. Dean also urged consumers to regularly test their smoke alarms, consider installing residential sprinklers and, as always, keep lighters and matches out of reach of children.

About NASFM

The National Association of State Fire Marshals (<http://www.firemarshals.org/>) has as its members the senior fire officials of the US states and District of Columbia. State Fire Marshals are responsible for fire safety code adoption and enforcement, fire and arson investigations, fire incident data reporting and analysis, public education and advising governors and state legislatures on fire protection issues. Some State Fire Marshals are responsible for fire fighter training, hazardous materials incident responses, wildland fires and the regulation of natural gas and other pipelines.

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