

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 1, 2013
AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 21, 2013
CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2013–14 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 127

**Introduced by Assembly Member Skinner
(Coauthors: Assembly Members Ammiano, Rendon, Stone, and
Williams)**

January 14, 2013

An act to add Section 18934.6 to the Health and Safety Code, relating to fire safety.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 127, as amended, Skinner. Fire safety: fire retardants: building insulation.

Existing law authorizes the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission to adopt regulations pertaining to urea formaldehyde foam insulation materials that are reasonably necessary to protect the public health and safety. Existing law provides that these regulations may include prohibition of the manufacture, sale, or installation of this insulation. Existing law also authorizes the Bureau of Electronic and Appliance Repair, Home Furnishings, and Thermal Insulation to establish by regulation insulation material standards governing the quality of all insulation material sold or installed in the state.

The California Building Standards Law requires all state agencies that adopt or propose adoption of any building standard to submit the building standard to the California Building Standards Commission for approval or adoption. Existing law requires the commission to receive

proposed building standards from state agencies for consideration in an 18-month code adoption cycle. Existing law requires the commission to adopt, approve, codify, update, and publish green building standards applicable to a particular occupancy, if no state agency has the authority or expertise to propose green building standards for those occupancies.

This bill would state that the Legislature finds and declares that it is in the best interest of the state to ~~eliminate~~ *reduce the use of flame retardant* chemicals from building insulation, while preserving building fire safety and encouraging healthy building practices. The bill would require the commission to adopt, approve, codify, and publish, during its next code adoption cycle, *updated flammability* standards that accomplish certain things, including maintaining overall building fire safety while giving full consideration to the long-term human and ecological health impacts associated with chemical flame retardants.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
- 2 following:
- 3 (a) To improve energy efficiency and to reduce global climate
- 4 change, the use of plastic insulation materials, such as polystyrene,
- 5 polyisocyanurate, and polyurethane, is increasing in buildings and
- 6 especially in green buildings.
- 7 (b) In the United States, flammability requirements for plastic
- 8 foam insulations and other building materials are incorporated into
- 9 building codes and fire regulations for building materials. To meet
- 10 these requirements, plastic insulation materials have
- 11 flame-retardant chemicals added to them, usually as halogenated
- 12 organic compounds with chlorine or bromine bonded to carbon.
- 13 (c) Studies have shown that these halogenated organic
- 14 compounds ~~are~~ *may be* associated with neurological and
- 15 developmental toxicity and endocrine disruption, and are possible
- 16 carcinogens.
- 17 (d) Flame retardants, whose primary use is in building insulation,
- 18 are found at increasing levels in household dust, human bodily
- 19 fluids, and the environment.
- 20 (e) Code provisions regulating plastic foam insulations in
- 21 buildings were first introduced in the early 1960s. Those code

1 provisions do not specify that chemicals be added to foam plastic
2 insulation, but in practice organohalogen flame-retardant
3 compounds are *commonly* added to meet test requirements.

4 (f) Despite these requirements, in the 1970s, serious fires
5 occurred from exposed foam plastic insulation. To address this
6 issue, the 1976 Uniform Building Code required plastic foam
7 insulation to be protected by a thermal barrier, usually as, or in the
8 form of, 0.5-inch-thick gypsum wallboard.

9 (g) Although, in most circumstances, the thermal barrier
10 regulations have been deemed to be sufficient for fire safety,
11 chemical flame retardants are still also required. Virtually all
12 foam-plastic insulation materials in the United States today,
13 including extruded and expanded polystyrene, polyisocyanurate,
14 and spray polyurethane foam, are treated with halogenated flame
15 retardants.

16 (h) Many flame retardants are known to pose serious health and
17 environmental hazards and are ~~actively~~ being banned or eliminated
18 from use in many parts of the world.

19 (i) Comprehensive investigations by fire-safety experts cast into
20 doubt the contention that the addition of flame retardants, at the
21 concentrations typically used in foam insulation, ~~measurably~~
22 improves fire safety.

23 (j) The presence of flame retardants does not prevent foam
24 plastic from burning and upon combustion can significantly
25 increase hazardous products like smoke, soot, carbon monoxide,
26 and potentially carcinogenic dioxins.

27 (k) The Steiner Tunnel Test (ASTM E-84), the most common
28 test procedure used to determine flammability, flame spread, and
29 smoke developed, produces misleading results when applied to
30 foam plastic insulation.

31 (l) Flame retardants add to the cost of foam insulation materials
32 while not appreciably enhancing fire safety. Thermal barriers, such
33 as drywall, provide ~~far greater~~ *adequate* protection against fire and
34 fire-spread than flame retardants.

35 (m) The International Code Council is considering adopting
36 exemptions to *the Steiner Tunnel* flame spread and smoke
37 developed requirements for foam plastics in the International
38 Residential Code where adequate thermal barriers, such as
39 0.5-inch-thick gypsum wallboard or one-inch thick masonry or
40 concrete, are present.

1 SEC. 2. Section 18934.6 is added to the Health and Safety
2 Code, to read:

3 18934.6. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that it is in the
4 best interest of the state to ~~eliminate~~ *reduce the use of flame*
5 *retardant* chemicals ~~from~~ *in* building insulation, while preserving
6 building fire safety and encouraging healthy building practices.

7 (b) The commission shall adopt, approve, codify, and publish,
8 during its next code adoption cycle, *updated flammability* standards
9 that accomplish both of the following:

10 (1) Maintain overall building fire safety while giving full
11 consideration to the long-term human and ecological health impacts
12 associated with chemical flame retardants.

13 (2) Ensure that there is adequate protection from fires that travel
14 between walls and into confined areas, including crawl spaces and
15 attics, for occupants of the building and any firefighters who may
16 be in the building during a fire.