

The Hazardous Handful - Five Chemicals to Avoid in Home Furnishings

Chemical	Potential Health Impacts	Use in Furnishings
Volatile Organic Compounds, VOCs (includes formaldehyde)	Cancer, reproductive toxicity (lowered fertility), neurotoxicity (headaches, nausea, memory problems, fatigue), asthma trigger, damage to liver, kidney and central nervous system, respiratory illness, eye irritation	To dissolve other materials, VOCs then release into the air as vapors. Found in adhesives, finishes, paint, coatings, composite wood.
Flame retardants (includes PBDE, chlorinated tris and Fyrol)	Cancer, reproductive toxicity (lowered fertility, lowered birth weight), endocrine disruption (hormone disruption, obesity, earlier onset of puberty), neurodevelopmental effects (lower IQ, hyperactivity, decreased memory and learning), immune impairment, diabetes	To decrease flammability, but studies have shown that the effect is negligible at best. Found in foam products (including mattresses, upholstered furniture, baby changing pads).
Fluorinated substances (includes PFAS, PFOA, PFOS and PSFs)	Cancer (kidney and testicular), reproductive toxicity (lowered fertility, lowered birth weight, birth defects), endocrine disruption (obesity, thyroid disease), immune impairment, liver disease, elevated total cholesterol	To confer stain, oil and water resistance. Found in upholstered furniture fabrics, rugs, adhesives and sealants
Antimicrobials (including triclosan and triclocarban)	Reproductive toxicity, endocrine disruption (thyroid problems), allergies, use can lead to resistant strains of bacteria	Found in mattresses, upholstery fabric, glues, finishes, paints, doorknobs
Vinyls (includes PVC), phthalates are often added to products with vinyls	Cancer, reproductive toxicity (birth defects), endocrine disruption (thyroid disruption), neurodevelopmental effects, immune impairment, asthma	Found in rigid plastics furniture parts, upholstery fabrics, imitation leather, inflatable products (such as stow-away mattresses), wallpaper, and flooring

These chemicals persist in the environment and bioaccumulate in the body.

For more information and guidance in how to contact suppliers to find out if any of the hazardous handful chemicals are present in their products, visit www.sustainablefurnishings.org.