

EBIA Communication

Mattresses are Safe – The Vital Societal Importance of Healthy Sleep Deserves Full Recognition

EBIA, the European Bedding Industries' Association represents the interests of the national federations of major European bedding articles' manufacturers and suppliers. Mattresses are by far the most important product line. As it concerns an item that is in intimate and lasting contact with the user, all inherent aspects related to safety, health and environment are of utmost concern to our industry.

In this respect, EBIA recognises the motives behind the European Parliament's and Council's General Product Safety Directive (GPSD) published in January 2002, aiming to set up safety requirements for each product launched on the market in view of maximum consumer protection. Nevertheless, certain points in the Directive regarding fire risk regulations have raised justified concern in the industry's circles. Hence, EBIA feels additional clarification on certain aspects of the future scenario is in the interest of all stakeholders.

Four main arguments underpin our position:

1. Whilst available statistical sources at European level already demonstrate that the risk tied to fires originating from upholstered furniture is very low, a further extrapolation of the figures suggests an even lesser risk percentage as to fire occurring in bed. Under the terms foreseen in the GPSD, a mattress is to be considered as a safer product, as it does not present a risk 'under normal or reasonably foreseeable conditions of use'.
2. In addition, as opposed to upholstered furniture mattresses are always covered before use. Direct contact with ignition sources is inexistent. Mattresses should therefore be perceived as a separate product category, contrary to the classification made in the study related to the fire performance of a selected group of products and mandated by the EC to the University of Paris, within the framework of the GPSD.
3. Additional treatment of mattresses (especially those for domestic use) with flame retarding chemicals is presently controversial and environmentally questionable, in correlation with incineration emissions at the end-of-life stage of the product. Information obtained by EBIA shows important differences in argumentation as regards fire safety between European countries in favour of a stringent legislation and those preferring to focus primarily on environmental aspects of the matter. Moreover, the use of fire retarding chemicals in mattress covers could also instigate potential health problems for the population, an issue that is presently under investigation (precautionary principle). The industry offers washable mattress covers, which are a very effective solution for people suffering from respiratory problems such as dust-mite allergy and asthma. The utilization of flame retardants in mattress covers would, however, imply that they could not be washed without losing their retardatory effect.
A further technological amelioration of fire retardant yarns could be a step in the right direction, though presently these do not provide a satisfactory solution for mattress

moisture regulation – a crucial factor for ensuring a dry sleeping climate recognised to be essential for a good night's rest.

- 4 It is important as well to take into account differences in life styles, individual countries and different housing conditions within the EU. EBIA strongly feels that based on knowledge and experience in concordance with the specificity of risks and demands at local level, each individual country should be in a position to develop, formulate and impose its own fire regulation system, best suited and responding to the existing needs and requirements based on the subsidiarity principle. An 'all in one bucket' policy approach resulting in a uniformity of fire regulations with regard to mattresses at EU level would in this context be ill-considered and undesirable.

The fire risk related to mattresses is very low. EBIA, representing the European bedding industries' legitimate interests and based on the above arguments, wishes to recommend to the EC to rather focus future research related to a fire regulation policy for bedding articles on developing a European-wide consumer education campaign for prevention of smoking in bed, as well as promoting the use of smoke detectors. The issues of both safety and health would thereby be tackled jointly.

The initiation of such a project could have invaluable merit in view of the continuing enlargement of the EU as well.

In willing to consider an approach along these lines, the EC will substantially contribute to preventing a potential risk in such a way that would not create a potential hazard to the consumer's health and to the environment. In this regard, EBIA offers the EC and all stakeholders full co-operation in elaborating the best possible solution for a high degree of consumer safety and protection within the framework of the GPSD.