AMERICAN BURN ASSOCIATION
Statement on Flame-Retardant Chemicals
June 18, 2012

The Chicago Tribune investigative series “Playing with Fire” raises serious questions about both the safety and efficacy of flame-retardant chemicals.

The American Burn Association (ABA) is a professional medical association consisting of physicians, nurses, physical and occupational therapists, social workers, nutritionists, psychologists, and others who care for people with burn injuries. ABA members, on a daily basis, witness the devastating effects of burn injury.

Burn prevention is a core mission of the ABA. ABA members are strong advocates for burn prevention measures that are both effective and safe. However, evaluating the efficacy and safety of specific technologies designed to reduce the risk or retard the spread of fire is not within the expertise of the ABA or its members.

Other organizations have both the expertise and responsibility to determine the efficacy and safety of such technologies. The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), a federal agency charged with ensuring the safety of products, is one of these.

The CPSC is currently considering a proposed rule to establish flammability standards for residential upholstered furniture (Federal Register: March 4, 2008, Volume 73, Number 43; 16 CFR Part 1634). Options for manufacture compliance relate to “cover materials that are sufficiently smolder resistant” or the use of “fire barriers that meet smoldering and open flame resistance tests between the cover fabric and interior filling materials”. A CPSC spokesperson described the proposed rule as one “that would limit the fire spread in upholstered furniture without requiring the use of flame-retardant chemicals.”

The ABA looks forward to the issuance of the finalized rule from the CPSC. This rule will provide expert evaluation of the effectiveness and safety of prevention technologies and assure that prevention efforts for burn injury are safe and effective for all.