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# NEWS RELEASE

## Firefighters and enviro groups band together to ban toxic fire retardants

**For Immediate Release**

**November 1, 2007**

OTTAWA – Canada’s professional firefighters and environmental groups are calling for a complete ban of all PBDEs – toxic fire-retardant chemicals used in many common household items such as televisions, sofas and mattresses.

PBDEs (polybrominated diphenyl ethers) are currently unregulated in Canada. The government has proposed regulations, but environmental groups have flagged them as ineffective because they exempt decaBDE, the most widely used chemical in this class. In fact, the proposed regulations would ban only PBDE mixtures no longer in use, affording little or no protection against chemical threats to health and the environment.

“Everyone agrees that *all* PBDEs are toxic. Inconceivably, the sticking point for government seems to be whether or not we should do anything about it,” says Lisa Gue, the David Suzuki Foundation’s environmental health policy analyst. “We are calling for all chemicals in this class, especially decaBDE, to be banned.”

The Canadian branch of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) also strongly supports a ban on all PBDEs, because of the occupational health hazards they present to their frontline workers. Firefighters are keenly aware of the dangers of highly flammable consumer products, but they also know many alternatives to PBDEs are available today.

“In particular, we are concerned about special dangers that members of our profession may face from this chemical, which we encounter in a combusted state in the course of our duties,” says Jim Lee, IAFF’s Assistant to the General President for Canadian Operations. “Firefighters, who routinely suffer exposure to toxic substances on the fireground despite the best respiratory and protective clothing practices, are at a significantly increased risk of cancer.”

Cancer is an epidemic among firefighters. In the seven-year period of 2000 to 2006, recognized occupational cancers claimed the lives of 63 full-time firefighters in Canada. Since 2002, six provinces have enacted legislation formally linking certain cancers to the profession.

“Any measure that takes a potentially dangerous chemical away from the firefighters’ workplace will enhance firefighter safety, and as a result, public safety,” says Mr. Lee, who was a Toronto firefighter for 30 years.

Sometimes referred to as “the new PCB,” PBDEs persist in the environment and bioaccumulate. Health effects include damage to the neurological, reproductive, immune, and hormonal systems. DecaBDE is also classified as a potential human carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Studies show that PBDEs levels in killer whales and other Canadian wildlife are increasing exponentially.

In February, Ecojustice (formerly Sierra Legal), the David Suzuki Foundation, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, and Environmental Defence formally challenged the government’s proposed PBDE regulations by filing a Notice of Objection under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA). The government has yet to respond.

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For background on the subject of PBDEs in Canada, visit: [www.davidsuzuki.org/health/toxics/](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/health/toxics/)  
For information about the Canadian branch of the International Association of Fire Fighters, visit: [www.iaff.org/canada/](http://www.iaff.org/canada/)

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