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CPSC MEETING LOG UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE

Meeting between: CPSC Commissioner Mary S. Gall and representatives of the American Textile Manufacturers Institute

Date of Meeting: September 18, 1998

Site of Meeting: CPSC Headquarters, East West Towers, Bethesda, MD

Meeting Topic: ATMI activities and position on applications of flame retardant chemicals used in upholstered furniture fabrics

Log Entry By: Dale R. Ray, CPSC Project Manager *DR*

Participants: CPSC: Commissioner Mary S. Gall
Patsy Semple, Special Assistant to Commissioner Gall
Carl Blechschmidt, Special Assistant to Commissioner Gall
Dale Ray, Project Manager, EC

ATMI: Patty Adair, Ass't. Director, Textile Products & Stds.
Hardy Poole, Director, Textile Products & Stds.
Steven Mischen, Exec. VP, Burlington Industries
Roger Berkley, President, Weave Corp.
Salman Chaudhry, Ass't. Mgr./QC, Weave Corp.
John Michener, Consultant (retired--Milliken Corp.)

Others: Celia Powell, Albright & Wilson
Carolyn Covey Morris, Albright & Wilson
Mary Martha McNamara, attorney, American Furniture Mfrs. Ass'n.

Summary:

ATMI requested this meeting to discuss some issues of concern to the textile industry, which supplies fabrics to upholstered furniture manufacturers, and to present information to the Commissioner on industry-sponsored activities regarding a) the flammability performance of backcoated fabrics and b) the potential economic impact of a small open flame upholstered furniture standard on textile producers and related industries.

Ms. Adair gave a brief overview of ATMI's concerns about CPSC's work to develop a draft flammability standard. She asserted that fabric manufacturers were generally unfamiliar with the use of flame retardant (FR) treatments that would likely be necessary to meet a standard, that a standard may cause significant disruption among textile companies, and that a number of issues about the potential toxicity of FR chemicals were not adequately resolved. She stated her hope that this meeting would be the first of several meetings between ATMI and CPSC on upholstered furniture.



Ms. Adair introduced presentations by Mr. Berkley, Mr. Mischen, and Mr. Michener. Mr. Berkley's firm (Weave Corp.) is relatively small, supplying mostly higher-priced fabrics in small quantities; Mr. Mischen's firm (Burlington) is much larger, supplying fabrics for mass market furniture producers, re-upholstery jobbers, and large retailers.

Mr. Berkley described the upholstery industry structure, including the chain of production and supply. He noted that many different companies not directly involved with upholstered furniture manufacturing may be affected by the Commission's actions. He also discussed the role of fabric converters and finishers, which process fabrics at various stages in the production process before the fabrics are delivered to furniture companies. Mr. Berkley presented some flow charts describing the distribution chain in further detail. Commissioner Gall requested copies of these charts (attached). Mr. Berkley noted that Weave Corp. does not perform FR or any other finishing operations, but rather contracts out such tasks to finishing companies. Mr. Mischen briefly discussed the way Burlington and other larger companies use FR treatments in fabric backcoatings, e.g., for the U.K. market (where mandatory furniture flammability regulations have been in existence for 10 years). Mr. Berkley and Mr. Mischen estimated that about half of all U.S.-market upholstery fabrics are (non-FR) backcoated.

The ATMI representatives described an ongoing ATMI-sponsored study of the flammability performance and physical characteristics of backcoated fabrics. Mr. Berkley disputed a statement, by Mr. Les Wilkinson of Mydrin (Bostik) U.K. at CPSC's May 5-6, 1998 public hearing on FR chemicals, that most fabrics could be backcoated using existing technology. Mr. Berkley stated that a number of fabrics, especially soft fabrics such as chenille and various pile fabrics, were particularly difficult to backcoat. Mr. Berkley stated that the backcoating study would be completed within the next month and that results would be shared with CPSC.

Mr. Michener described some of the preliminary results of his review of some scanning electron micrographs of various FR and non-FR backcoated fabrics (he provided a copy of a computer disc containing the micrographs, but did not present these at the meeting). He noted a wide variety of effects associated with these backcoatings, e.g., on the "hand" or feel of the fabric, colorfastness, and light (fading) resistance. Some of the backcoated fabrics exhibited color bleed-through while others did not, and some backcoatings came through the fabric surface. He said that some backcoatings are stable for long periods of time, but that FR treatments may lessen the durability of such backcoatings. Mr. Michener noted that many backcoatings are applied to confer certain properties (e.g., resistance to seam slippage, ease of cutting and sewing) only through the furniture manufacturing process, and are often not intended to last for the expected service life of the finished product. Mr. Mischen said that results from the backcoating study may be available in November, 1998.

Ms. Adair and Mr. Mischen then described a planned economic impact study to be funded by an industry coalition (including ATMI, the Decorative Fabrics Association, the American Fiber Manufacturers Association, the National Cotton Council, the American Society of Interior Designers, and a number of fabric converters and retailers). The study, to be prepared by Glassman-Oliver Economic Consultants, Inc., is to examine, in three phases, potential costs and benefits of a CPSC standard and economic impacts on all affected industry sectors, including furniture and fabric producers, converters, jobbers and suppliers. The first phase is to be completed by the end of 1998. Commissioner Gall expressed interest in receiving copies of any reports from this study.

The ATMI representatives invited the Commissioner and her staff to visit some textile companies to see how fabrics are made and processed. Mr. Michener noted that it appeared in the past that ATMI's input was not always solicited or welcomed in the development of a small open flame standard. He expressed his hope that a continuing exchange of technical data and other information could now be maintained.

Weaving Mills Distribution Chain



