

**Preliminary Legal and Socio-Economic Study for the Projected
Decree on Fire Safety Standards for Upholstered Furniture in France
February 2006
Summary**

- **The object:**

The aim of this study, carried out by Mrs. Christine Chevallier, under the responsibility of Mr. Jean-Hervé Lorenzi, a member of the Economic Analysis Council assisting the French Prime Minister, was to identify in terms of costs and advantages the consequences of implementation of maximum protective measures in the provisions of the draft decree on fire safety standards for upholstered furniture which is at present under preparation.

Its conclusion is that the adoption of maximum fire safety standards would mean a net economic benefit for the general public.

- **The Background:**

In France today, a fire breaks out in the home every 2 minutes. 10,000 people are affected, 600 of whom die. This is the most dangerous household risk.

Developments observed over the last 25 years have shown that fires start more easily and develop faster due to the increasing use of synthetic materials in the home (TV sets, bedding, upholstered furniture)

- **The Issue:**

A decree which is currently being prepared aims at imposing a “minimum” fire protection standard on upholstered furniture for domestic use: non-flammability under the effect of a burning cigarette.

The study shows that this project risks being ineffective:

- in terms of fire safety
- in terms of benefit to the general public
- and without solving the strategic issues at present facing the furniture industry.

It needs to go further.

- **Examples from other countries:**

In the United Kingdom, restrictive legislation brought introduced in 1988 has required upholstered furniture to be cigarette and match resistant and for the development of the fire to be controlled if the furniture still burned (synthetic foams treated by the manufacturers, mainly with flame retardants).

Results: although the total number of fires has continued to grow since the legislation was set up, the number of fatal accidents appears to be falling.

In the United States, similar studies carried out on the basis of the State legislation applied in California have shown comparable results.

- **The position in France:**

The study carries out a simulation of the cost/benefits of adopting such measures in France, and considers the following figures realistic:

In the short term:

- 15 lives saved additionally every year as existing furniture is gradually replaced by new fire safe furniture (that is 30 lives saved in year N+2, etc)
- 173 injuries prevented additionally every year (246 injuries saved in year N+2, etc)
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In the long term, when a majority of pre-Decree furniture has been replaced at the end of its lifetime by fire safe furniture:

- a reduction of 7.5% in the number of fires per annum
- a reduction of 35% in the total number of fire injuries per annum
- 210 lives saved per annum

Taking as a basis the value set on human life in France, estimated at 1 million Euros, and the value of the prevention of one injury, estimated at 125,000 Euros, the study thus evaluates the benefits for society of reinforced standards at:

- 15 million Euros a year for lives saved one year after introduction of the standards, 210 million Euros per year in the long term,
- 29 million Euros a year for injuries prevented after one year, 402 million Euros in the long term, and
- 8 million Euros a year for damage to property prevented after one year, 114 million Euros in the long term,

against a cost for the furnishing industry estimated at 3% of its turnover, i.e. 21 million Euros a year.

Compared to the absence of a legislation, the net annual benefits with a view to lives saved, injuries prevented and damage to property prevented are estimated at 30 million euros per annum (after one year) and 705.5 million euros per annum (long-term).

- **The consequences for the furnishing industry:**

- From an economic point of view, the study emphasises the importance of the quality brand and safety image the French industry has to promote to stand up to the competition, in particular the Chinese, who are producing furniture at low prices.
- From a legal point of view, adopting maximum safety measures would actually contribute to protecting manufacturers of upholstered furniture, who might otherwise be sued for damages due to defective products following a fire.

This study has been carried out for the Association des Brûlés de France (ABF) and the ACFSE (Alliance for Consumer Fire Safety in Europe) which is supported by EFRA (European Flame Retardants Association).