



National Center for Healthy Housing

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EPA Responds to Advocacy Pressure to Regulate Formaldehyde in Homes

Columbia, Maryland – On June 21, EPA agreed to a series of investigative steps that will move the nation closer to national standards for reducing formaldehyde in housing.

The move comes on the heels of a March 24, 2008 petition launched by over 25 environmental, housing, and health organizations to extend the California formaldehyde standards nationally. The California standards require a dramatic reduction in formaldehyde off-gassing from hardwood plywood, particleboard, and medium density fiberboard, which are used in most low-cost furniture and wood building materials.

Formaldehyde in housing gained national attention when groups such as the Sierra Club identified high levels of the chemical in the homes of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita survivors residing in FEMA trailers.

“Formaldehyde is a known carcinogen and can cause severe irritation to the respiratory system and may aggravate asthma. It is commonly found in pressed and composite wood products such as furniture, doors, and windows. Formaldehyde is of special concern for children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing respiratory problems,” said Rebecca Morley, executive director of the National Center for Healthy Housing.

The composite wood manufacturing industry has expressed concerns with both the cost and its ability to meet the standards and deadlines established within the California rule. However, EPA’s approach allows for careful consideration of these concerns.

EPA agreed to conduct a four-part investigation of formaldehyde in homes, schools and offices, including:

1. Issuing an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to investigate whether and what type, of regulatory or other action might be appropriate to protect against risks posed by formaldehyde emitted from pressed wood products;
2. Undertaking an external peer review on formaldehyde’s cancer and non-cancer risks and evaluating risks and options available under the Toxic Chemical Substances Act (TSCA);
3. Surveying the industry, conducting a risk assessment on the respiratory effects of formaldehyde and safe exposure levels; and
4. Cooperating with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of its anticipated revisions of the manufactured housing standards.

For a copy of the March 24 petition to EPA and the list of organizations supporting it visit <http://www.epa.gov/oppt/chemtest/pubs/response4.pdf>.

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The National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) is the only national scientific and technical non-profit organization dedicated to creating healthy and safe homes for America's children through practical and proven steps. NCHH develops scientifically valid and practical strategies to make homes safe from hazards, to alert low-income families about housing-related health risks, and to help them protect their children. NCHH also works with governmental and non-governmental organizations to develop standards and programs and guide their implementation through insurers, lenders, federal and state laws and regulations, community organizations, and the courts.