EXTRUDED POLYSTYRENE FOAM ASSOCIATION

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U.S. EPA Assesses Three Alternative Flame Retardants For Polystyrene Building Insulation

(WASHINGTON, D.C.)—The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (U.S. EPA) Design for the Environment Program (DfE) recently finalized a hazard assessment of alternatives to hexabromoyclododecane (HBCD), a flame retardant used in energy efficient extruded polystyrene (XPS) building insulation.

DfE is a program that helps consumers, businesses, and institutional buyers identify chemical products that perform well, are cost-effective, and are safer for the environment.

The assessment considered three chemical alternatives to HBCD—butadiene styrene brominated copolymer, TBBPA-bis brominated ether derivative, and TBBPA bis (2,3-bibromopropyl) ether—and found all three of the alternatives to exhibit low to moderate hazard for human or environmental health.

Flame retardants are used in XPS foam building insulation to enable manufacturers to meet rigorous international building and fire safety codes and standards. Research shows that flame retardants slow the spread of fire and can allow occupants additional time to escape.

HBCD has been used safely for decades to help protect people and property from fire, and there are no restrictions on the use of HBCD in building insulation in the United States. A number of government agencies worldwide have conducted risks assessments on HBCD, concluding that exposures to the flame retardant from insulation poses little if any risk for building occupants because these potential exposures are low.

Although HBCD was added to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants in May 2013, signatories to this treaty were allowed to apply for a five-year exemption for continued use of this flame retardant in energy-efficient foam insulation only. The exemption is based on several factors, including the essential contribution of foam insulation to energy efficiency measures, because HBCD alternatives are not yet globally available in sufficient quantities, and because potential exposure to HBCD from foam insulation is low.

A transition from HBCD to the alternative flame retardants assessed under the DfE program is expected to occur over the next four to five years, as global production capacity of the new flame retardants ramps up. In the meantime, the companies that manufacture XPS foam insulation are working with testing labs and evaluation services to ensure the reformulated product continues to meet the physical property, performance and fire safety characteristics expected of XPS foam insulation.

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About XPSA

The Extruded Polystyrene Foam Association (XPSA) is a trade association representing manufacturers of Extruded Polystyrene Foam (XPS) insulation products and the industry's raw material suppliers. XPSA members collectively manufacture more than 95% of all XPS destined for use in the North American market. XPSA promotes the benefits that accrue to society from appropriate use of XPS foam insulation applications.