

# Healthy Furnishings for Safer Child Care

*Information on carpet, flooring, furniture and more*



Your choice of household furnishings is important for more than just comfort, looks and cost – products like carpet, upholstered furniture, and pressed wood can contain toxic chemicals that can linger, affecting your indoor environment long after your initial purchase. During use, these products degrade over time. Chemicals used for preservatives, flame retardants, or stain-resistance are released and build up in house dust, and in our bodies. Since we spend 90% of our time indoors, taking the time to identify the healthiest possible interior furnishings before you buy can make a difference.

## What to Avoid:

**Formaldehyde:** Used in glues and adhesives for particleboard and plywood, formaldehyde is highly flammable and has a noticeable odor. People breathe in formaldehyde when it off-gasses from furniture. Formaldehyde is a carcinogen and asthmagen.

✓ **Spot it:** Particleboard, plywood, fiberboard furniture and cabinets, flooring adhesive.



**Polyvinylchloride (PVC) or Vinyl:** Phthalates make PVC soft and flexible. Inside our bodies, phthalates can act like hormones, leading to reproductive problems, especially in baby boys. They can also promote or trigger allergies and asthma attacks. Over 90% of phthalates are used in vinyl, like flooring in our homes.

✓ **Spot it:** Vinyl flooring, tiles, wallpaper, and synthetic carpet.



**Stain-resistant chemicals:** Perfluorinated compounds (PFCs) build up in the environment and do not break down naturally. They are used to make stain-resistant carpets, furniture and drapery fabrics as well as after-market spray treatments. PFCs likely cause cancer, and may cause liver or kidney damage.

✓ **Spot 'em:** Anything labeled stain-repellant or stain-resistant.

**Brominated and chlorinated flame-retardant chemicals:** Petroleum-based items, like polyurethane foam used in soft furnishings, are very flammable. Manufacture sometimes add chemicals directly to foam to meet old California flammability standards. In commercial settings, curtains may be required to meet flammability standards as well. These chemicals release from products, build up in our bodies and household dust, and can harm hormone systems and child development.

✓ **Spot 'em:** Padded furniture, especially filled with polyurethane foam. Carpet padding, especially recycled composite padding, which may contain old, illegal flame retardants. Commercial fire-retarded curtains.

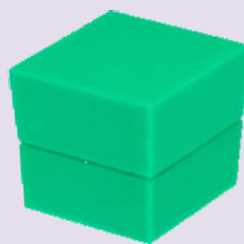


## What Can I Do?

- **Look for solid wood**, unpainted furniture, which will not contain formaldehyde or flame-retardant chemicals.
- **Choose furniture that doesn't contain formaldehyde-containing glues.** Check for labels that say no added formaldehyde (NAF) or ultra-low emitting formaldehyde (ULEF) product.
- If particleboard without the above labels can't be avoided, **finish with a non-toxic sealant** (latex paint won't seal in vapors)
- **Reduce the risk of allergies** and asthma by avoiding carpet and PVC when possible. Instead, you can opt for natural flooring like cork, bamboo, or linoleum.
- **If you choose carpet**, look for one made from recycled PET, not nylon. Extra bonus: PET carpet is naturally stain resistant!
- **Consider whether carpet padding is necessary** – skipping it eliminates a common source of flame-retardant chemicals.
- **Look for GreenGuard certified products.** Carpets, carpet padding, and flooring with this certification emit low- or no-VOCs. ([www.greenguard.com](http://www.greenguard.com))
- **Choose furniture made with polyester fill.** Avoid furniture with polyurethane foam.
- **Call the manufacturer** and ask which chemicals they use in the product.
- **Decline optional stain- or water-proof treatments** and ask for products that have not been pre-treated.

### WHICH IS WHICH?

Polyurethane foam is uniformly springy, keeps its shape, and generally several inches thick. Polyester fill (or fiberfill) is more airy and plush, and does not have a defined shape.

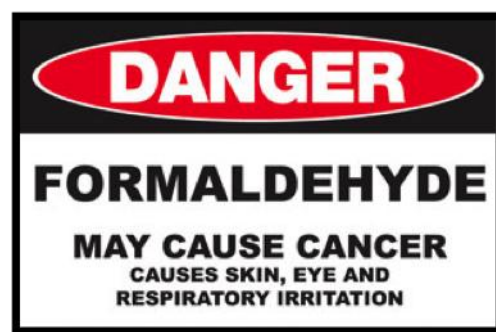


*For PVC-free carpet, flooring, and furniture manufacturers (and much more!) check out the PVC-free guide from CHEJ:*

[www.cleanhealthyny.org/PVC\\_Alternatives\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.cleanhealthyny.org/PVC_Alternatives_Guide.pdf)

## For More Information:

- **Phthalates:** [www.ewg.org/key-issues/toxics/phthalates](http://www.ewg.org/key-issues/toxics/phthalates)
- **Formaldehyde:** [www.saferchemicals.org/resources/chemicals/formaldehyde.html](http://www.saferchemicals.org/resources/chemicals/formaldehyde.html)
- **PBDEs and flame retardants:** [www.toxicfreefiresafety.org](http://www.toxicfreefiresafety.org)
- **PFCs:** [www.healthybuilding.net/healthcare/2009-04-20PFCs\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://www.healthybuilding.net/healthcare/2009-04-20PFCs_fact_sheet.pdf)
- **PVC:** [www.cleanhealthyny.org/PVC\\_Alternatives\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.cleanhealthyny.org/PVC_Alternatives_Guide.pdf)



Reviewed by:



& their EHCC Science Task Force

Supported by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency  
Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (draft materials)



Created by Clean & Healthy New York, 62 Grand St, Albany NY 12207  
518-641-1552, [info@cleanhealthyny.org](mailto:info@cleanhealthyny.org), [www.cleanhealthyny.org](http://www.cleanhealthyny.org)