

3/15/95

MEETING LOG UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE

Meeting Between: CPSC staff members and representatives of the American Furniture Manufacturers Association (AFMA)/Upholstered Furniture Action Council (UFAC)

Date of Meeting: February 15, 1995

Site of Meeting: CPSC Headquarters, East-West Towers

Meeting Topic: CPSC activities on recliner chairs & upholstered furniture

Log Entry By: Dale R. Ray, EC *DR*
Project Mgr., upholstered furniture

Participants: AFMA/UFAC: Joseph Gerard, AFMA VP/Gov't Affairs
Joseph Ziolkowski, UFAC Executive Dir.
CPSC: Robert Wager, Director, OCR
Kate Wallace, OCR
Eric Rubel, General Counsel
Patsy Semple, Commissioner Gall's ofc.
Ron Medford, Director, EXHR
Marc Schoem, CA
Dale Ray, EC
Non-CPSC: Nick Wakeman, Product Safety Letter

Summary:

Mr. Gerard and Mr. Ziolkowski presented their views on two topics: Compliance actions regarding recliner chairs, and the regulatory development project on upholstered furniture flammability.

Recliner Chairs

The AFMA/UFAC representatives described their recent involvement in a Compliance inquiry into the spring mechanisms in certain recliner chairs. The industry representatives asked about the usual procedures for gathering information from associations and from individual firms. Mr. Ziolkowski had provided some names of suppliers of reclining chair spring mechanisms to Compliance, whereupon Compliance contacted all identified companies regarding the potential hazard. Since AFMA had been involved in the development of a voluntary standard to address the hazard, they stated their belief that they should have been more involved in Compliance's written and other contact with the companies.

Mr. Schoem and Mr. Rubel discussed the procedures involved in such investigations, and noted that although trade groups may be asked to provide general information (as was the case here), they are rarely brought into discussions with individual firms. A number of questions about CPSC's procedures were discussed, and the issue of whether the chairs in question were pre- or post-standard production was raised. The identity and characteristics of the products themselves were not discussed.

Upholstered Furniture Flammability

Mr. Gerard described the results of the recent UFAC/AFMA-sponsored survey of UFAC participant firms conducted by a consultant, Heiden Associates, Inc. This report was delivered to the CPSC staff in December, 1994. Mr. Gerard said the report demonstrated adequate conformance to the UFAC voluntary guidelines for cigarette ignition resistance of upholstered furniture components. Mr. Ziolkowski described recent UFAC-sponsored chair cushion tests (using a methenamine pill to simulate a small open flame ignition source). He said the results showed no significant difference in ignitibility between California TB-117-specification cushions and UFAC-specification cushions, and concluded that the safety benefits of adopting such an approach would probably be small.

The UFAC/AFMA representatives stated that the California approach to the small open flame hazard was the least costly one under consideration, and that neither the California standard or any other standard could be expected to pass any reasonable cost-benefit test. They therefore concluded that no further Commission resources should be put into open flame standards development. They further stated that the Heiden report data were sufficient to demonstrate that no further work was needed with respect to cigarette ignition hazards. They recommended that CPSC terminate all current work on upholstered furniture flammability and work with the industry to develop appropriate information/education programs, perhaps targeted at low-income consumers who are at greatest risk of death from furniture and other home fires.

Mr. Medford, Mr. Rubel and Mr. Ray discussed the ongoing staff work on cigarette and open flame ignition risks, and emphasized that no regulatory development activity was underway or planned regarding cigarette ignition. Since the Commission voted to initiate a regulatory proceeding on small open flame hazards, CPSC staff noted that if industry wanted the proceeding to be terminated, it was important that new information be submitted to support such a decision.

A recent trade press article that mentioned the Heiden report was also discussed. CPSC staff characterized the data from the Heiden report as helpful in evaluating general industry conformance to the UFAC voluntary guidelines, though the staff is conducting its own independent testing to evaluate conformance.