

Statement of Patrick MacRoy, Executive Director, Alliance for Healthy Homes at EPA Public Hearing on Formaldehyde in Composite Wood Products

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Good Afternoon. My name is Patrick MacRoy and I'm the Executive Director of the Alliance for Healthy Homes. The Alliance is a national non-profit public interest organization focused on the elimination of health hazards from housing. As signatories of the TSCA citizen's petition requesting adoption of the California formaldehyde limits in composite wood, we remain disappointed that EPA did not accept its requests. Although additional time has been wasted, we are pleased that the EPA has decided to consider a rulemaking on this important topic.

It is difficult to discuss formaldehyde without reflecting upon the disaster that was the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Compounding FEMA's incompetent response to the disaster itself was the long term housing of evacuees in trailers "off-gassing" high levels of formaldehyde. Many residents, and especially many children, found themselves not only facing the difficult task of rebuilding their lives but also coping with the now well-documented onslaught of health problems associated with their toxic trailers. As EPA moves forward with regulation, it is essential that you hear from these victims and understand their misfortunes that are a direct result of poorly regulated building materials. We were pleased to learn that EPA has scheduled an additional hearing in New Orleans and hope you'll take to heart the tragic experiences of gulf coast residents that so clearly demonstrate the need for this regulation.

The problem with formaldehyde in composite wood products, however, extends far beyond trailer homes and temporary housing. The ubiquity of composite wood products in our building materials and furniture products makes almost anyone who lives in a newer home, who remodels their home, or who purchases new furniture at risk of substantial exposures to formaldehyde.

The dangers of formaldehyde are clear. Although the carcinogenicity of formaldehyde is an adequate enough reason to demand regulations, we are especially concerned about its action as a respiratory irritant. We know that even low concentrations are associated nose and throat irritation, chest pain and shortness of breath. There is substantial evidence that there is a causative relationship between asthma and formaldehyde exposure. We also know that children are more susceptible to the ill effects of respiratory irritants due to their relatively higher rates of respiration.

We believe the science is clear that formaldehyde is dangerous and there is no definable safe limit of exposure to formaldehyde vapors. Beyond those with a vested interest in proving otherwise, there is little disagreement on this fact. We hope that a review of the science will consider the industry-funded junk science attempting to prove otherwise as just that: Junk science.

So many of the health hazards we seek to address in housing are part of the existing structure. Whether it be lead-based paint, mold, carbon monoxide, or radon, the solution relies upon controls implemented on a unit-by-unit basis. Regulation of formaldehyde, however, gives us a rare opportunity to greatly improve the health conditions of our housing and even reduce asthma incidence, by imposing controls at factories. We implore you to seize this opportunity.

The good news, though, is that it's an exceptionally easy opportunity to seize. California has already done the heavy lifting. The CARB ATCM was arrived at after a lengthy process that involved advocates and the regulated community. It created a standard that effectively calls for the greatest achievable reduction of formaldehyde emissions from composite wood in its second phase. And, perhaps most importantly, it created an enforcement mechanism through product testing and third party verification.

The first phase of the CARB rule is already in effect. Industry is preparing to meet the second phase requirements. This is especially true of domestic manufacturers – those we want to support to retain jobs and turn this recession around – in comparison to their foreign competitors. We have a truly rare situation where not only is a regulation already well understood, if not accepted, by a large swath of the industry, but implementing the regulation could provide a boost to compliant domestic manufacturers and increase their market share.

Yet, this rule is enforceable only in California. And given the large percentage of imported composite wood products, it's a rule that the State of California will have a difficult time enforcing. It is clear that we need a national requirement, and we need one now. We strongly support a regulation that mirrors the CARB ATCM standards, second phase deadlines, and third-party product testing requirements. We hope the EPA will pursue such a course with utmost speed.

Thank you.