

To the jury

For years, manufacturers have packed toxic flame retardants into the foam cushions of upholstered furniture found in homes across America. Companies did this even though research shows that the chemicals — linked to cancer, developmental problems and impaired fertility — don't slow fires and are migrating into the bodies of adults and children.

That began to change in 2012 when the Chicago Tribune's investigative series "Playing With Fire" exposed how the chemical and tobacco industries waged a deceptive, decades-long campaign to promote the use of flame-retardant furniture and downplay the hazards.

As a result of the series, flame retardants became one of the top public health issues of the year. The U.S. Senate held two hearings, the Environmental Protection Agency began a broad investigation and an industry front group exposed by the newspaper folded. Most significantly, California announced it would scrap the rule responsible for flame retardants' presence in most U.S. homes, meaning manufacturers may soon stop adding the chemicals to furniture and baby products.

The series encompasses more than a year of work by reporters Patricia Callahan, Sam Roe and Michael Hawthorne.

To reveal the surprising role of Big Tobacco in the buildup of toxic chemicals in American homes, Callahan sifted through the 13 million records cigarette companies made public after settling lawsuits. Internal memos and strategic plans showed how Big Tobacco planted an operative inside the National Association of State Fire Marshals and used that organization to promote flame-retardant furniture.








To expose how chemical makers distorted science, Roe painstakingly dissected their studies. He tracked one study to the National Library of Sweden, had it translated and found that the industry's sweeping claims about flame retardants were based on just eight TV fires in Stockholm.

Roe also proved that the "common" upholstery fabric used in one set of tests was actually a heavily flame-retardant material made for theater curtains.

To illustrate government's failings, Hawthorne obtained previously undisclosed documents revealing how regulators allowed flame retardants onto the market without thoroughly assessing health risks.

Reporters attended obscure hearings on furniture rules to witness industry manipulation firsthand. In California, Callahan heard the chemical industry's star witness, burn surgeon David Heimbach, tell lawmakers a gripping story about a baby girl fatally burned because of a lack of flame retardants. But when Roe reviewed 16 years of county medical examiner records, he discovered that the baby Heimbach described did not exist.

Using IRS records, corporate franchise tax reports and lobbying disclosure forms,

Results	
The "Playing With Fire" series prompted swift results from lawmakers, regulators and manufacturers.	
	Gov. Jerry Brown announced the state would scrap the rule responsible for flame retardants' presence in furniture nationwide. The new rule — the de facto national standard — is expected to take effect this summer. It will make flame retardants unnecessary in furniture and many baby products sold nationwide for the first time since 1976.
	The Tribune series prompted two Senate hearings, including one in which senators assailed executives from the world's largest manufacturers of flame retardants. "Don't you owe people an apology?" California Sen. Barbara Boxer asked. Also, a key Senate committee approved toxic reform legislation — the first time since 1976 that comprehensive changes to the Toxic Substances Control Act made it out of committee. Twenty-six senators also sent a letter to the EPA asking for quick action.
	The Environmental Protection Agency announced it would conduct a broad investigation of flame retardants, and, in response to Tribune-sponsored lab testing, the Consumer Product Safety Commission said it would test babies' exposure to flame retardants from crib mattresses.
	After the Tribune revealed Citizens for Fire Safety was a front group for manufacturers of flame retardants, the industry shut down the group. The Tribune also showed how the group's star witness, burn surgeon David Heimbach, testified about fatally burned babies who did not exist. In response, the University of Washington, where Heimbach taught for years, admonished him for his testimony.
	Facing a tougher regulatory climate, the two largest manufacturers of a flame retardant linked to cancer vowed to end production. After Tribune testing found significant amounts of flame retardants in its products, retailer Wayfair said it would stop selling Angeles mattresses, popular at child-care centers.
	More than 100 nurses, mothers and cancer survivors marched on Capitol Hill for tougher regulations.
	Forty-six state legislators from 12 states asked the U.S. Senate to act. Twenty-one legislators sent a similar letter to the industry's leading trade group.

Impact: Please see the first page of the supplemental material for a chart summarizing how the "Playing With Fire" series prompted swift action from lawmakers, regulators and manufacturers.

Callahan proved that the organization sponsoring Heimbach — the Citizens for Fire Safety Institute — was actually a front group for the largest makers of flame retardants.

And when the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission said it had never tested crib mattresses for retardants, the Tribune did, finding that three popular brands contained significant amounts.

Among the series' results:

Broad reform measures. California's planned overhaul of its flammability standard is expected to take effect this summer, making flame retardants unnecessary in furniture and many baby products nationwide. The EPA began an investigation of chemicals highlighted in the series, and the CPSC said it would test babies' exposure to flame retardants from crib mattresses.

Action by the U.S. Senate. Senators held two hearings, including one in which they assailed executives from the world's largest manufacturers of flame retardants. "Don't you owe people an apology?" Sen. Barbara Boxer asked. A key Senate committee also voted to overhaul the nation's chemical safety law — the first time since 1976 that comprehensive changes to the Toxic Substances Control Act advanced from committee.

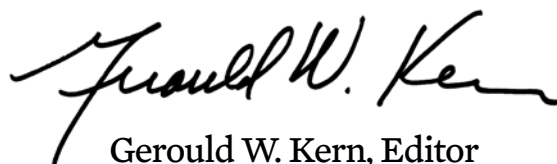
Increased transparency. The chemical industry shut down Citizens for Fire Safety, and the University of Washington admonished Heimbach over his testimony.

Industry changes. Facing a tougher regulatory climate, the two largest manufacturers of a common flame retardant linked to cancer vowed to end production of the chemical. After Tribune-sponsored lab testing, a national retailer halted sales of potentially hazardous crib mattresses.

The series inspired editorial writers and columnists at Bloomberg, The New York Times and other media outlets to call for action. "If you want a case study of everything that is wrong with money politics, this is it," Nicholas Kristof wrote in the Times. Health advocates marched on Capitol Hill, while outraged readers thanked the Tribune. "You've done a tremendous justice for us all," one wrote.

For digging deep to expose a pattern of deception and prompt change on a vital health issue, we proudly nominate Callahan, Roe and Hawthorne for a Pulitzer Prize in investigative reporting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerould W. Kern". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gerould" being the most prominent.

Gerould W. Kern, Editor