

pinfa Advisory Board

Background & Past Meetings

Last updated: July 2020

The section on the previous Advisory Board meetings is a capture of the inputs from individual participants. The views included are therefore those of single participants and not the consensus of the Advisory Group as a whole.

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1. Background of the pinfa Advisory Board

Pinfa represents the manufacturers of phosphorus, inorganic and nitrogen flame retardants (PIN FRs) and is a Sector Group within Cefic, the European Chemical Industry Council. The members of pinfa share the common vision of continuously improving the environmental and health profile of their flame-retardant products. In addition, pinfa regards and promotes flame retardants as an essential element of fire safety technologies. These are the reasons why pinfa members seek to maintain a dialogue with the users of PIN FRs to identify the needs and technologies they are looking for.

In recent years, there has been increased public discussion about FRs. Concerns have been raised about the environmental impacts of FRs, largely, but not solely, regarding halogenated FRs. Conversely, where FR use has decreased, concerns have been raised about fire safety. Subsequently, a debate emerged about the appropriate use of FRs and if alternatives being used provide sufficient fire safety.

This group convenes on average twice a year. It is an open group, meaning pinfa extends invitations to new stakeholders depending on the topics discussed.

This document captures the content of the past meetings as an easily accessible source for a broad audience. It is a supplement to the report of the 7th Advisory Board meeting, which took place on 27 May 2020.

The Chatham House Rule

The meetings follow the Chatham House rule, whereby minutes include who attended and what was discussed, but opinions are not attributed to individual participants.

Competition and Compliance

The meetings are held in strict compliance with EU and international antitrust laws as well as Cefic dos and don'ts.

2. Previous pinfa Advisory Board meetings

During the past 6 meetings, 11 core topics have been discussed, which can be grouped into 4 themes. In order to track key issues and their developments, the group keeps a running list of core topics and key questions for each of these subjects. These topics were not all addressed in the 7th meeting.

The report of the 7th pinfa Advisory Board meeting is available as a separate document.

a. Fire safety

Spread of fire

Firefighters report an increase in flashovers that happen very quickly, sometimes within as little as 4 minutes. This impacts escape time and fire fatalities. Firefighters are convinced this is connected to the use of modern, polymeric materials in consumer products. Furthermore, single compartment fires can very easily develop into multi-compartment ones. Insulation materials do not always slow the spread of fires, and polymeric window frames do not prevent fire spread sufficiently. Firefighters believe that standards focus too heavily on individual products, and not enough on the role of products collectively in a room or house environment. Such risks are compounded by a less mobile, ageing population because of reduced escape time in houses. A report from Belgium claims that by 2030 the risk of fire fatalities could worsen by as much as 30%.

Questions for group consideration

1. Can flame retardants help decrease the flame spread and should pinfa members take this into account more?
2. Should fire prevention strategies focus more on the interaction of flammable materials rather than their individual fire load? If so, how?

Statistics on fires

Fire statistics are insufficient and often collected differently in different countries. Some focus too much on the ignition source but not on what led to flashover. Case studies on the benefits of extra regulation (e.g. the 1988 U.K. furniture regulations) have led to a polarised debate.

Questions for group consideration

1. Should the statistics issue be addressed, or are there other issues that should be tackled as a priority?

Fire safety data of flame retardants

There is no consensus on which facts and figures are relevant to analyse and evaluate fire safety tests. This leads to uncertainty on what constitutes a fire-safe product and undermines scientific analysis of fire safety.

Questions for group consideration

1. How do we move from agreed 'micro' evidence (i.e. fire tests, videos etc) to 'macro' evidence focussed on the number of fires, injuries, and fatalities?

b. Advocacy & public opinion

Fire safety advocacy

Currently, there is a disconnect between firefighters witnessing problems on the ground, industry, and policymakers. Firefighters are organised differently in each country (e.g. professionals, volunteers, military). They have not always had a resourced or unified advocacy voice which has allowed for advocacy groups to step in. This includes industries with a commercial interest.

Questions for group consideration

1. Is it a medium-term solution to have a European fire safety agency, similar to agencies that exist in other policy fields?

Public opinion on the safety and sustainability of FRs

Flame retardants continue to struggle with negative public opinion. There are no clear authoritative assessments or overviews of alternatives to halogenated FRs.

Questions for group consideration

1. What more can be done to convince the public that there are safe FRs?
2. If companies are planning to move away from legacy flame retardants, what gives them confidence in the alternatives?
3. How do companies avoid regrettable substitution?

Positive lists of FRs

A number of organisations have created 'positive lists' of FRs that are considered to be sustainable and provide the required fire safety. It may be that this trend increases in the future to address the FR perception problem. For now, pinfa members have agreed to include specific information about product substances in their entries in the pinfa product selector.

- TCO (Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees) has created a [positive list](#) of 26 non-halogenated FRs, which continues to be viewed as an excellent example of encouraging the sustainable use of FRs.
- FRs have been assessed using the GreenScreen™ methodology. One OEM is now asking its suppliers to only use chemicals which score "Benchmark 2" or higher on GreenScreen.
- ChemSec launched a project, [Marketplace](#), that focuses on listing chemicals that can be acceptable substitutes and encouraged pinfa and others to participate.

Questions for group consideration

1. How can sustainable FRs be further recognised?

c. Sustainability & public health

Circular economy

As this topic moves from theory to concrete policies, there are choices to be made about plastic additives, including FRs. Industry should prepare to implement practical choices concerning the circular economy.

Questions for group consideration

1. What will the circular economy mean for plastic additives such as flame retardants?
2. What should happen around product design and at the end of the product's life?
3. What should happen to products currently in circulation?
4. How can circular economy goals and fire safety both be achieved for polymeric materials?

Smoke toxicity

Firefighters continue to worry about the long-term effects of being exposed to smoke. Pinfa previously commissioned scientific work on the smoke formation and toxicity of materials with flame retardants. Over 100 samples have been collected for testing, of materials with non-halogenated FRs, benchmarked against materials with brominated and chlorinated FRs, and base materials without FRs. The results show that the PIN FRs overall have little effect on the (acute) toxicity and amount of smoke from polymers.

Questions for group consideration

1. How can we build on the Crepim-pinfa smoke study?
2. How do the smoke results for polymers compare to natural materials?

Standardisation

Standards have their pros and cons compared to legislation. While standards are easier to develop and implement than legislation and are consensually agreed on, their effectiveness and enforcement are often lower than is the case with legislation. Standards are not a solve-it-all solution to drive sustainable change.

Questions for group consideration

1. Are standards a positive way forward to improve the sustainability of flame retardants?

Recycling

In order to improve the recyclability of materials, more transparency is needed on the actual composition of these materials. Downstream production stakeholders often resist the push for more transparency due to commercial sensibilities. There is no EU-wide approval framework concerning the sustainability of materials yet.

Questions for group consideration

1. What steps can be taken to ensure commercial confidentiality while sharing composition information for recyclability?
2. Should recycling be legislated/standardised at the European level? If so, with what instruments?

d. Emerging trends

Swedish FR tax

Sweden has created a tax on FRs, as a revenue-raising measure and a way to implement chemical policy without deferring to Brussels. Such tax creates the precedent of a patchwork of signals to the supply chain, further complicating choices about substitution. It is estimated to increase the price of a computer monitor by approximately 20%. Previously it had been argued that it is futile to support the abolition of the tax, but it could be possible for it to be amended and based on inherent hazard properties, e.g. using GreenScreen.

Questions for group consideration

1. What role should “local” instruments like taxes have in supporting the transition to more sustainable (flame retardant) technologies?
2. How can it be ensured that the right incentives are set, i.e. the taxation scheme is based on a factual assessment of flame retardant properties and that compliance can be effectively controlled?