

Safety features rank high with furniture industry

Safety should rank high on the list of priorities, along with value for the money and aesthetics, when the consumer goes shopping for upholstered furniture.

Ontario manufacturers of upholstered furniture have recognized that safety is as basic a consumer right as freedom of choice, self-expression and the right to information about products available in the marketplace.

The Ontario furniture industry is so committed to fulfilling the basic consumer right to safety it has spent most of the past decade and thousands of dollars to help prevent the loss of homes and loved ones, irreplaceable personal possessions and family treasures - not to mention sharply escalated insurance rates - caused by household fires.

Unlike some European and Asian countries where fire safety regulations for the home are controlled by government legislation, in Canada responsibility for protecting one's property and family from fire rests with the individual consumer.

It has been estimated that approximately 98 per cent of the fires started in the home are preventable. The causes range from cooking related accidents to inadequate elec-

trical wiring, from carelessness with lighted cigarettes to children playing with matches.

In Canada a fire that starts in the home endangering the lives and property of neighbors is not considered a criminal offence. But while accidental fires are not viewed in Canada as careless, criminal behavior Canadians are encouraged by industry and government to think and plan for safety.

Recognizing that everything in the home is potential fuel for a fire when exposed to sufficient heat, makers of such household furnishings as mattresses, carpets, draperies and wallcoverings, for example, have dramatically altered their products.

So, too, have Ontario manufacturers of upholstered furniture looked for ways to make their product more resistant to burning cigarettes. The number of home fires starting in upholster is estimated at two per cent. It is believed that 80 per cent of these fires, at least, are preventable.

Data shows that 80 per cent of fires in upholstered furniture are started by burning cigarettes abandoned by smokers who have fallen asleep or were affected by alcohol or prescription or non-prescription drugs.

To help reduce the number of fires and fire loss the furniture industry has formed UFAC, the Upholstered Furniture Action Council to lead the search for new methods and materials for the manufacturing of furniture that is more resistant to cigarette ignition.

Most upholstered furniture manufactured in Ontario today meets all UFAC construction criteria. This "safer" furniture carries the UFAC gold hangtag which states, "Important consumer safety information form UFAC".

UFAC, the group of industry leaders who spearheaded this effort, also warns consumers on the hangtag to, "Remember to practice careful smoking habits. For early warning equip your home with properly placed smoke detectors and maintain them regularly."

Consumers concerned for their own and their family's safety are buying this "safer" furniture. Many people are replacing old furniture with upholstered pieces that meet the UFAC criteria.

The furniture industry urges consumers to look for the UFAC gold hangtag when shopping for furniture.

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