



**Commissioner Thomas H. Moore  
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission**

Presentation before the

**UFAC PRESS BREAKFAST**

at

**The International Home Furnishings Market**

**High Point, North Carolina**

**Saturday, April 20, 1996**

GOOD MORNING.

IT IS A PLEASURE TO BE IN THE FURNITURE CAPITOL OF THE WORLD. I JUST HOPE I CAN GET MY WIFE OUT OF HERE WITHOUT OUR HAVING TO RENT A U-HAUL TO CARRY BACK HER PURCHASES! I HAVE A FEELING I'LL BE GETTING THAT 'REDECORATING' LOOK FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

I WAS TAKEN ON SOME VERY INTERESTING TOURS YESTERDAY. I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCY OFFICIALS TO LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ABOUT THE INDUSTRIES THEY OVERSEE. YOU'LL

NOTICE I DIDN'T SAY ABOUT THE INDUSTRIES THEY REGULATE .

WHILE I BELIEVE THE AUTHORITY TO REGULATE IS ESSENTIAL IN THE PRODUCT SAFETY AREA, I ALSO BELIEVE THAT, WHERE THEY CAN BE REACHED, VOLUNTARY SOLUTIONS ARE MUCH PREFERABLE. THEY GIVE INDUSTRY A MORAL, IF YOU WILL, STAKE IN THE LEVEL OF CONFORMANCE. FROM EVERYTHING I HAVE HEARD TO DATE, THE CREATION OF UFAC, EVEN THOUGH ITS "REACH" IN THE INDUSTRY IS BEING QUESTIONED, HAS BEEN A BOON TO THE CONSUMER BY INCREASING THE SAFETY OF UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE, BOTH IN THIS COUNTRY AND ABROAD. I ALSO APPLAUD YOUR EFFORTS TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT FIRE HAZARDS IN GENERAL AND, IN PARTICULAR, ABOUT THE NEED TO HAVE WORKING SMOKE DETECTORS IN ALL HOMES.

IN MY SHORT TIME ON THE COMMISSION, I HAVE TAKEN A SPECIAL INTEREST IN FIRE SAFETY ISSUES. I BELIEVE IT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT AREAS IN THE COMMISSION'S JURISDICTION AS CONSUMER PRODUCTS PLAY A ROLE IN NEARLY EVERY RESIDENTIAL FIRE. MUCH HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED IN THIS AREA ALREADY. THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT DECLINE IN RESIDENTIAL FIRES IN THIS COUNTRY (DOWN FROM 757,500 IN 1980, TO 470,000 IN 1993).

THE COMMISSION HAS TAKEN A NUMBER OF ACTIONS OVER THE YEARS WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THAT DECLINE, SOME OF THEM REGULATORY, SOME OF THEM EDUCATIONAL, SOME THROUGH THE OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE AND MANY BY WORKING COOPERATIVELY WITH INDUSTRY, SUCH AS YOURS, AND WITH VOLUNTARY STANDARDS SETTING GROUPS.

THE COMMISSION IS PRESENTLY WORKING ON A NUMBER OF PROJECTS WHICH SHOULD HELP TO FURTHER REDUCE FIRE HAZARDS IN THE HOME. ONE PROJECT STEMS FROM ALLEGATIONS THAT SOME TYPES OF THERMOPLASTICS, WHICH ARE INCREASINGLY USED AS SUBSTITUTES FOR OTHER MATERIALS IN APPLIANCES, DEGRADE TOO READILY. IF AN APPLIANCE HAS AN ELECTRICAL FAILURE, INSTEAD OF THE APPLIANCE MERELY CEASING TO OPERATE, THE ELECTRICAL FAILURE CAN OVERHEAT THE THERMOPLASTIC CAUSING IT TO DISTORT, GREATLY INCREASING THE CHANCES FOR A FIRE. THE COMMISSION STAFF IS CURRENTLY LOOKING AT THERMOPLASTICS AND THE TYPES OF APPLIANCE COMPONENTS MADE FROM THEM TO SEE WHAT, IF ANYTHING, SHOULD BE DONE TO PROTECT CONSUMERS FROM THIS POTENTIAL HAZARD.

ANOTHER PROJECT WE ARE JUST COMPLETING CONCERNS AGING HOME ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS. AS YOU MAY IMAGINE, OLDER, OVER-TAXED, DETERIORATING ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS CAN CAUSE FIRES. THERE ARE, ON AVERAGE, ABOUT 43,000 FIRES EACH YEAR IN THIS COUNTRY RELATED TO THE DISTRIBUTION OF ELECTRICITY IN HOMES. THESE FIRES CLAIM NEARLY 350 LIVES A YEAR, INJURE ALMOST 5 TIMES THAT MANY AND COST THIS NATION ABOUT SIX HUNDRED NINETY MILLION DOLLARS EACH YEAR IN PROPERTY DAMAGE.

IN FOUR CITIES AROUND THE COUNTRY:

- CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MARYLAND;
- REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA;
- ATLANTA, GEORGIA; AND
- ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

CPSC HAS REHABILITATED THE ELECTRICAL SYSTEM OF AN OLDER HOUSE TO SHOW HOW TO FIX SERIOUS ELECTRICAL HAZARDS FOR A MODEST INVESTMENT.

THE COMMISSION, IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE U.S. FIRE ADMINISTRATION, THE FEDERAL NATIONAL MORTGAGE ASSOCIATION AND SEVERAL INSURANCE COMPANIES, IS PRODUCING TWO TECHNICAL VIDEOS TO SHOW INEXPENSIVE WAYS TO CORRECT CERTAIN HAZARDOUS ELECTRICAL PROBLEMS, BASED ON THE CALIFORNIA AND GEORGIA REHABILITATION PROJECTS. WE WILL BE SENDING COPIES OF THESE VIDEOS TO HOME INSPECTION COMPANIES AND NATIONAL AND STATE FIRE OFFICIALS, AMONG OTHERS, TO HELP EDUCATE HOMEOWNERS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF OLDER RESIDENTIAL WIRING AND THE OPTIONS FOR ELIMINATING THOSE DANGERS.

THE COMMISSION HAS ALSO DIRECTED THE STAFF TO WORK WITH INDUSTRY TO ADDRESS THE TRAGEDY OF DEATHS AND INJURIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE IGNITION OF FLAMMABLE VAPORS BY GAS-FIRED WATER HEATERS. A TYPICAL SCENARIO INVOLVES THE SPILLAGE OR USAGE OF GASOLINE OR OTHER FLAMMABLE LIQUID IN THE VICINITY OF A GAS-FIRED WATER HEATER. THE FUMES FROM THE FLAMMABLE LIQUID ARE DRAWN INTO THE HEATER AND IGNITED, CAUSING A FLASHBACK FIRE OR EXPLOSION. EACH YEAR CLOSE TO 2000 FIRES ARE CAUSED BY THIS DEADLY COMBINATION, RESULTING IN 316 INJURIES, 17 DEATHS AND TWENTY-SIX MILLION DOLLARS IN PROPERTY DAMAGE.

THE GAS WATER HEATER INDUSTRY HAS BEEN WORKING COOPERATIVELY WITH OUR STAFF TO FIND A TECHNICAL SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM. AT THIS POINT, IT LOOKS ENCOURAGING THAT A TEST METHOD CAN BE DEVELOPED TO DETERMINE A GAS-FIRED WATER HEATER'S RESISTANCE TO FLAMMABLE VAPOR IGNITION AND THAT WATER HEATERS CAN BE DESIGNED TO DRAMATICALLY REDUCE, IF NOT ELIMINATE COMPLETELY, THE LIKELIHOOD OF IGNITION OF FLAMMABLE VAPORS.

ALTHOUGH ONE OF THE GREAT SUCCESS STORIES IN FIRE SAFETY HAS



UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE WAS INITIATED BY A PETITION FILED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FIRE MARSHALS. THE COMMISSION HAS AN OBLIGATION TO PERIODICALLY MONITOR THE VOLUNTARY STANDARDS UPON WHICH IT RELIES AND TO CAREFULLY EXAMINE PETITIONS WHICH RAISE LEGITIMATE ISSUES OF CONCERN.

MANY TIMES THESE TYPES OF PROCEEDINGS UNCOVER INFORMATION WHICH IS USEFUL IN UNEXPECTED WAYS OR LEADS TO CONSTRUCTIVE CHANGES TO A VOLUNTARY STANDARD THROUGH COOPERATIVE EFFORTS BETWEEN COMMISSION STAFF AND THE INDUSTRY.

I KNOW MANY OF YOU HAVE BEEN BRIEFED RECENTLY BY DALE RAY, THE PROJECT MANAGER ON UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE, ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE SMALL OPEN FLAME TESTING WHICH THE STAFF IS CONDUCTING. THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE DONE IN THE TESTING AND DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS AREAS. THE COMMISSION IS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE RULEMAKING. NO OPTIONS HAVE BEEN RULED OUT AND NO MINDS HAVE BEEN MADE UP. YOUR WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE AND PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROCEEDING WILL BE INVALUABLE TO THE CPSC AND TO THE AMERICAN CONSUMER.

ONE THING WE ARE MINDFUL OF AT THE COMMISSION, IS THE RELATIVE NEWNESS OF ANOTHER ACTION TAKEN BY CPSC TO ADDRESS THE INCIDENCE OF FIRES STARTED BY SMALL OPEN FLAMES--THE REGULATION REQUIRING DISPOSABLE CIGARETTE LIGHTERS TO BE CHILD-RESISTANT. WE WON'T BEGIN TO SEE THE FULL IMPACT OF THIS REGULATION FOR A WHILE, BUT WE EXPECT IT TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF FIRES STARTED BY SMALL OPEN FLAMES.

IN THAT REGARD, IT IS DISCOURAGING TO NOTE THAT SOME CONSUMERS SEEM DETERMINED TO DEFEAT THE CHILD-RESISTANT FEATURE OF THE LIGHTERS, AND THERE IS EVEN A PRODUCT ON THE MARKET SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO REMOVE THE CHILD-RESISTANT MECHANISM. FORTUNATELY, MOST LIGHTER COMPANIES ARE AWARE THAT THEIR FIRST EFFORTS TO MEET THE REGULATION WERE NOT POPULAR WITH ADULT USERS AND HAVE REDESIGNED THEIR LIGHTERS SO THEY STILL MEET OUR REGULATIONS BUT ARE EASIER FOR ADULTS TO OPERATE, THEREBY MAKING IT LESS LIKELY ADULTS WILL TAMPER WITH THE CHILD-RESISTANT FEATURE.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT A GOOD BEGINNING AND A GOOD ENDING MAKE A GOOD SPEECH, IF THEY COME CLOSE TOGETHER. WITH THAT, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR INDUSTRY. BECAUSE OF MY PERSONAL INTEREST IN BRINGING DOWN THE NUMBER OF FIRES AND THE TERRIBLE TOLL THEY TAKE ON THIS COUNTRY, I AM PARTICULARLY PLEASED TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ADDRESS AN INDUSTRY GROUP DEDICATED TO MAKING PRODUCTS SAFER FROM FIRE IGNITION. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU IN THE FUTURE TO DO ALL WE CAN, AS PARTNERS, TO CONTINUE OUR JOINT FIRE SAFETY MISSION--IT'S GOOD FOR BUSINESS--AND IT'S GOOD FOR U.S. CONSUMERS.