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Food & Rural Affairs

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Lia Margolis,

During the response to Baroness Neville Rolfe's oral question on household recycling on 9 October, you asked me about the safe disposal of flame-retardant items.

The Government's 25 year environment plan sets out a clear commitment to increase substantially the amount of Persistent Organic Pollutant (POPs) material being destroyed or irreversibly transformed by 2030. We consider this an important issue and are discussing the implications of the decaBDE (decabromodiphenyl ether) ban with industry representatives in waste, recycling, construction, demolition and soft furnishings. DecaBDE is a flame retardant that has been used in different products including in some soft furnishings. The production and use of decaBDE will be banned under the Stockholm Convention in December 2018 and subsequently under the REACH Regulation in March 2019.

The 2005 General product safety regulations require manufacturers to label their products with any warnings and instructions for their use and disposal. At present, householders with flame-retardant bulky items should contact their local authority to find out how best to safely dispose of these items in their area and can arrange for their local authority to collect the item. How local authorities elect to dispose of such bulky items depends on local infrastructure. Where possible, some local authorities will elect to break down bulky items and recycle what they can. In other cases these items are shredded and incinerated. Some will also be sent to landfill.

UK manufacturers have reduced their use of decaBDE in soft furnishings over many years and we are currently doing research to understand the risks in relation to new and legacy products across multiple sectors. We are also considering the best routes for disposal of waste containing POPs and the implications for the public and business.

A copy of this response will be placed in the House Library.

Johnson, John