

ALERT SHEET

From the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

CELLULOSE INSULATION (August 1978)

The increased use of home insulation to help reduce heating and cooling costs has also focused attention on its safety aspects. The hazards of cellulose insulation and how to buy and install it safely are the subject of this consumer alert.

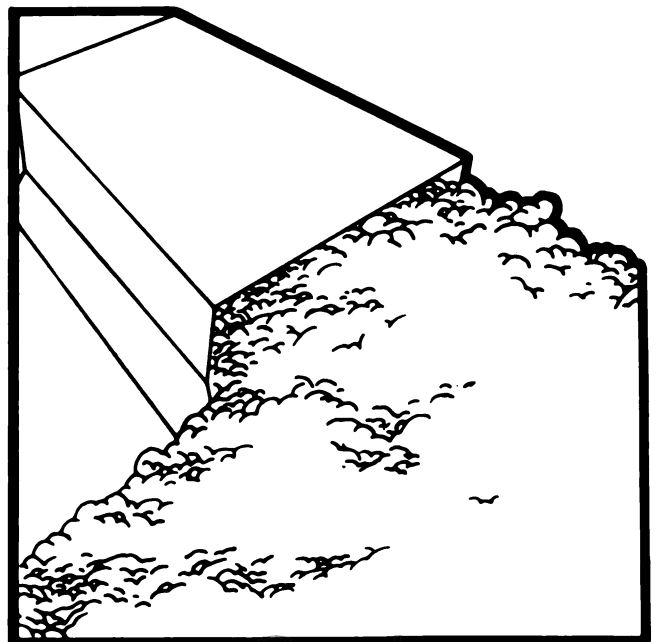
Usually made from ground-up or shredded paper, cellulose insulation is normally treated with chemicals to make it resistant to fire and vermin. Properly manufactured, treated, and installed, cellulose can have a high insulating value and meet the Federal flammability standard for cellulose insulation. Cellulose insulation manufactured with **improper** amounts and kinds of fire retardants, however, may present a flammability hazard or cause corrosion problems. Some cellulose insulation is treated with chemicals which can combine with moisture in the air and corrode some metal parts that are in contact with the insulation.

Acting on these possible hazards, Congress has enacted a law that amends the Consumer Product Safety Act to require the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to publish a mandatory safety standard for cellulose insulation. The standard adopts certain aspects of the GSA (General Services Administration) Federal specification HH-I-515C dealing with flame resistance and corrosiveness. Cellulose insulation manufactured after September 7, 1978, must meet the requirements of the new standard.

Loose fill poured or blown-in, and "wet process" cellulose insulation all are covered by the standard. ("Wet process" insulation is blown into an area with a spray or mist of water applied at the nozzle during installation.)

The flame resistance test method in the standard calls for the use of a Steiner tunnel to test the flame spread rate of cellulose insulation; that is, how far flames from the material will spread within a certain time. A flame spread rating of **25 or less** is required to pass the test; this is on a scale where asbestos-cement board rates 0 and red oak flooring rates 100. The standard also includes tests for corrosion and for the permanence of the fire retardants in cellulose insulation.

Consumers should be aware that cellulose insulation manufactured **before** September 8, 1978, the effective date of the standard, can be sold after that date although it may not meet the standard; some insulation manufactured before the effective date of the standard,

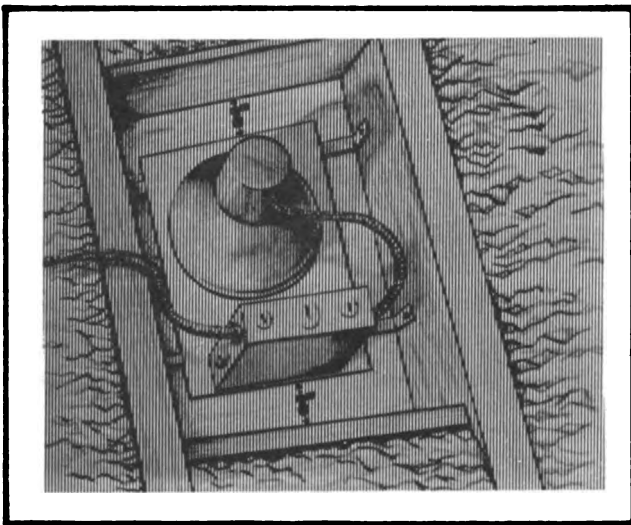


however, may meet the standard. Cellulose manufactured after September 7th must carry the following statement on any bag or container:

"ATTENTION: This material meets the applicable minimum Federal flammability standard. This standard is based upon laboratory tests only, which do not represent actual conditions which may occur in the home."

A homeowner can specify that a contractor only use insulation that is labeled with this statement or certify that it meets the standard.

The proper installation of insulation can be as important to your safety as the product itself. **Keep insulation at least three inches away from the sides of any recessed light fixture or wiring box near such a fixture. Never place it on top of**



recessed light fixtures. If placed too close to fixtures, even cellulose insulation that meets Federal flammability standards could trap heat, causing smoldering and fire. Ask your local building code officials for installation requirements around exhaust flues, chimneys, and other heat sources. It is important that consumers who already have cellulose insulation installed in their attics check that insulation is **permanently** kept away from heat producers; barriers made of wood, sheet metal, or ordinary window or insect screen wire, for instance, can be built to accomplish this.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends the following tips when installing cellulose insulation yourself:

- Read the instructions on the package carefully before installing the insulation.
- Do not let insulation block attic eave vents. Adequate ventilation helps avoid excess



moisture build-up. Otherwise, moisture could cause the insulation to lose its insulating qualities.

- Since some fire retardant chemicals may be absorbed through, or irritate the skin, wear protective clothing, such as long sleeves, long trousers, gloves, and goggles. Wash these clothes separately from other clothes.
- A vapor barrier, used with insulation, is intended to prevent moisture from getting into the insulation. Check with your local building code officials about the need for a vapor barrier in your area.

For further information about cellulose and other kinds of home insulation, see CPSC's Fact Sheet No. 91: *Home Insulation*.

To report a product hazard or a product-related injury, write to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207. In the continental United States, call the toll-free hotline 800-638-2666. Maryland

residents only, call 800-492-2937. *The teletype hotline for the deaf is 800-638-2690. Maryland residents only, call 800-492-2938. The TTY operates from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. EST.*

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