MEMORANDUM

MOTION M-102 FORMALDEHYDE EMISSIONS

Date: Ottawa, February 7, 2017
To: All MPs
Prepared by: Rémi Massé, MP for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia

Dear colleagues,

I am sharing this briefing note with you to present the motion I introduced in the House on December 8, 2016. Motion M-102 deals with formaldehyde emissions from composite wood products intended for indoor use that are sold, provided, or supplied for sale in Canada (particleboard, medium density fibreboard (“MDF”) and hardwood plywood). I would like to enable an informed discussion on this motion during its first hour of debate on February 16, 2017, and ultimately obtain your approval when it is voted on in the House.

Formaldehyde

Formaldehyde is a colourless gas that is emitted mainly from household products and building materials. Formaldehyde is an irritant, and exposure to high concentrations of formaldehyde can cause burning sensations in the eyes, nose and throat, respiratory problems and cancer. Formaldehyde may be present in homes caused by fumes from household products or building materials used inside the home.

Health Canada has established residential indoor air quality guidelines that summarize the health risks of specific indoor pollutants. They also provide information on known health effects of indoor air contaminants, indoor sources of air contaminants, recommended exposure limits, and recommendations to reduce exposure to pollutants. Although there is a formaldehyde emissions standard for composite and hardwood plywood panels, CAN/CSA-0160, it is voluntary. It is therefore not enforced and not compulsory, as is the case for statutory regulations and/or regulations, thus limiting Canadians’ protection from the harmful effects of formaldehyde emissions from sources such as composite and hardwood plywood panels.
Composite panels

Composite panels are consumer products made of recycled wood residue and are increasingly common in the daily lives of Canadians. These panels have several uses, such as in the manufacture of furniture, desks, shelving, cabinets, flooring and even toys.

Formaldehyde comes mainly from the resin used as glue in producing these composite and hardwood plywood panels.

Strict U.S. regulations

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the U.S. and caused considerable damage in Louisiana, forcing thousands of Americans from their permanent homes. In response to this state of emergency, the Federal Emergency Management Agency temporarily housed these individuals in trailers, which caused health problems. In 2008, the U.S. government determined that these health problems were linked to the formaldehyde in the composite wood used in trailer construction. This resulted in numerous lawsuits between Americans, trailer builders and installers. These lawsuits were settled in 2012.

In January 2015, the program 60 Minutes showed high levels of formaldehyde in laminate flooring imported from China and widely sold in the U.S., upsetting a segment of the U.S. population.

Following this and a number of other incidents, on December 12, 2016, the U.S. government announced a final rule on formaldehyde emission standards for composite wood products to protect against the harmful health effects of this colourless gas. Since these regulations came into force, all U.S. and foreign manufacturers of composite wood products (particleboard, medium density fibreboard (“MDF”) and hardwood plywood) wishing to sell or make these products available to American consumers have until December 12, 2017, to comply with the certification program and new U.S. environmental standards.

Impact on the Canadian market

To continue exporting to the U.S., Canadian manufacturers have made significant investments in their facilities to meet or exceed U.S. environmental standards, the toughest in the world, particularly with regard to formaldehyde emissions.

As most Canadian composite panel manufacturers have already invested in their operations to meet U.S. environmental standards, they will continue to be able to export to the U.S.
Some foreign composite panel manufacturers that have not made the necessary investments in their operations to meet the new American environmental standards will be looking to liquidate their products in countries with less stringent environmental standards, such as Canada. In that case, the use of composite panels in these countries with very high formaldehyde emissions could have significant effects on the health of Canadians who buy these manufactured products. Furthermore, such a scenario would put Canadian manufacturers at a competitive disadvantage compared to foreign manufacturers and could have significant economic impacts for Canadian manufacturers.

**Canadian composite panel manufacturers**

In Canada, 13 factories in six provinces produce composite panels; four of these factories are in Quebec. As most of these factories are in rural communities, they provide major economic benefits to these regions. Canadian composite panel factories employ 11,500 workers, pay close to $724 million in wages and have about a $3.41 billion impact on Canada’s economy. A little over 70% of Canada’s production of raw panels and products made with raw panels are exported to the U.S.

**Recommendations**

Enact Canadian regulations so that all panels made of wood composites and hardwood plywood sold, provided, or supplied for sale in Canada, are subject to a certification program similar to the one in the U.S. This would reduce Canadians’ exposure to formaldehyde fumes while promoting the best practices of the Canadian industry, which already meets strict standards.

**Consideration**

Canadian composite panel manufacturers already meet U.S. regulations. Consequently, they support instituting similar regulations in Canada.

**Next step**

Obtain your support for Motion M-102 Formaldehyde Emissions, worded as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) adopt regulations on formaldehyde emissions for composite wood products intended for indoor use that are sold, provided, or supplied for sale in Canada; and (b) ensure that these regulations are similar to US Environmental Protection Agency regulations enforcing the formaldehyde emissions standards in the US Toxic Substances Control Act Title VI in order to protect the health of Canadians who use these products.