2024: UNSHAKABLE

AHFA YEAR IN REVIEW

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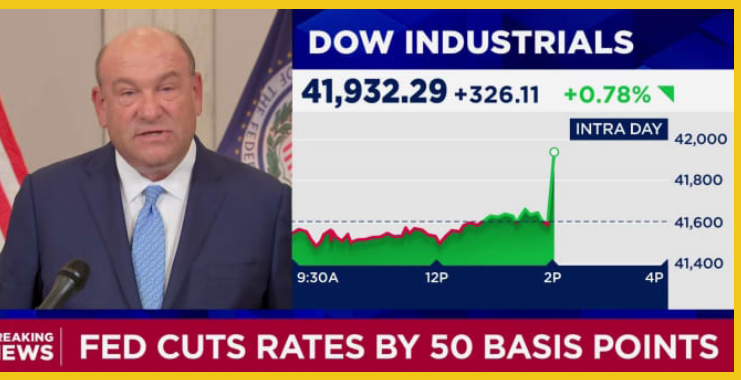
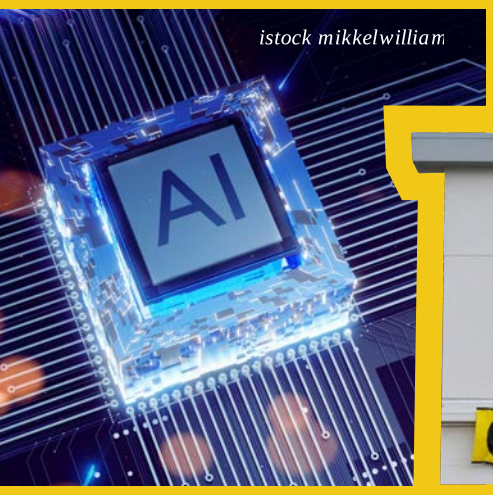
Chris Pedota, NorthJersey.com





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DESPITE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY IN 2024, THE AMERICAN HOME FURNISHINGS ALLIANCE REMAINED

UNSHAKABLE

As 2023 came to a close, there was cautious optimism that 2024 would hold a post-pandemic rebound for the home furnishings industry. At AHFA's November 2023 Annual Meeting, a leading economist reminded Board Members that upper income households still had significant "residual savings." There was less talk of recession and more focus on continued strong job growth. He cautioned, however, that inflation was being "sticky," and home affordability had hit an all-time low.

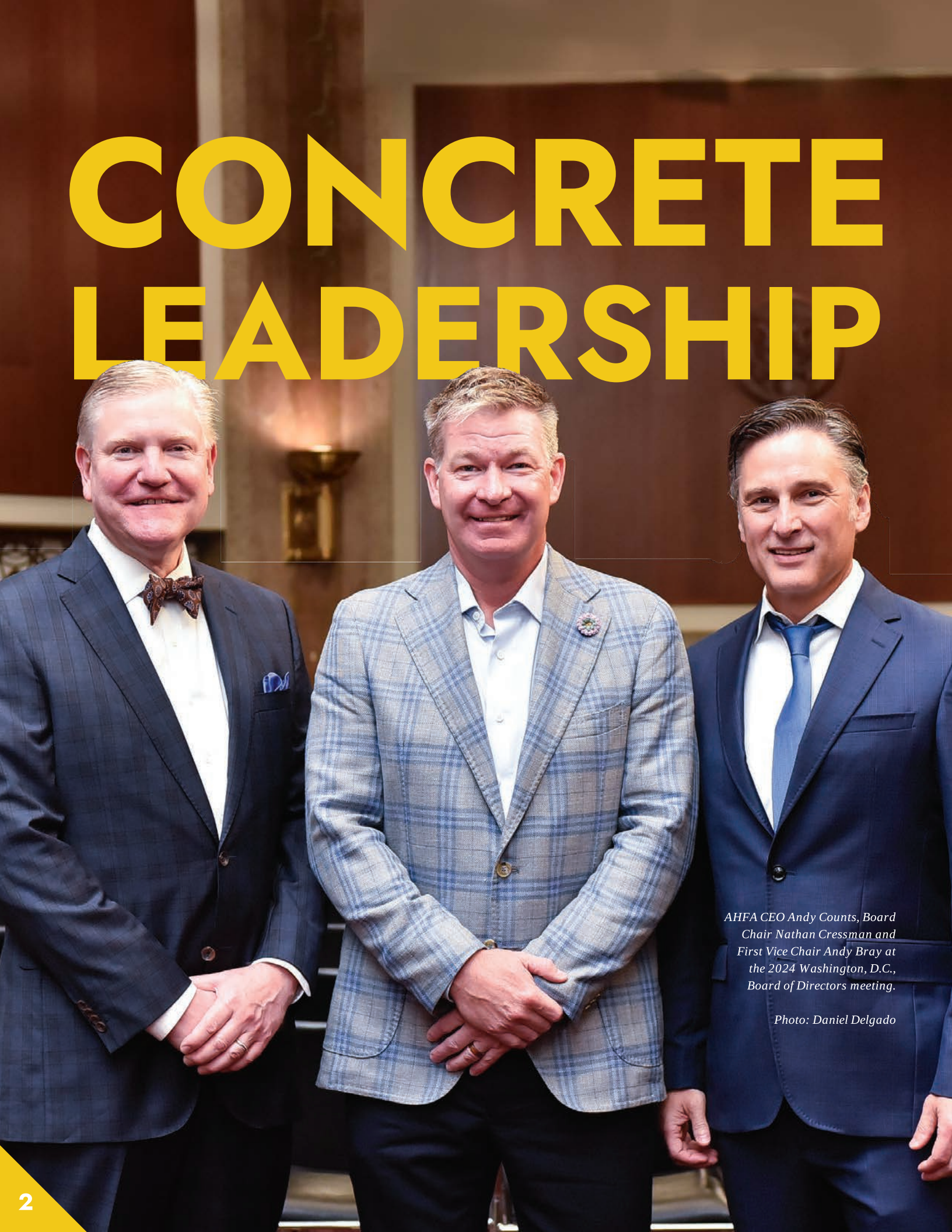
In the early months of 2024, rising food and housing prices indeed stuck around, creating a growing sense of fatigue and malaise among consumers. The turbulent election year political climate only exacerbated their discontent. The business environment was further rocked in July with not one but two major retail bankruptcies, and supply chain challenges created a troubling undercurrent throughout the year, with infrastructure bottlenecks, rising freight rates, a brief but disruptive East and Gulf Coast port shutdown and nagging inventory imbalances.

In tough years, AHFA can help provide firm footing for member companies, according to 2024 Board Chair Nathan Cressman. In his monthly *Furniture Executive* messages, he urged members to take advantage of AHFA's resources and to recognize and appreciate the power behind maintaining a strong "alliance."

Following the annual May government affairs meeting in Washington, D.C., and the August Regulatory Summit, Cressman noted the ***concrete action*** on regulatory issues made possible by AHFA's engagement and presence "at the table" over decades. Business tools and resources that remain accessible month by month provide ***solid groundwork*** members can rely on year after year. And our affiliates offer ***pillars of support*** for the specialized segments of our industry they represent.

Every year brings tremors under foot. Varying degrees of economic uncertainty, global unrest, technology advances, political turmoil and consumer expectations all contribute to the level of disturbance experienced by individual companies as well as by the industry as a whole. 2024 was a reminder that, regardless of the forces that may rock the industry, AHFA remains ***unshakable***.

CONCRETE LEADERSHIP



AHFA CEO Andy Counts, Board Chair Nathan Cressman and First Vice Chair Andy Bray at the 2024 Washington, D.C., Board of Directors meeting.

Photo: Daniel Delgado

ADVOCACY & REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

AHFA member companies faced both newly implemented and soon-to-be-implemented product safety and environmental regulations in 2024. Whether addressing product stability, formaldehyde emission limits or required import certificates, AHFA focused on helping members develop a clearly defined and effective compliance strategy.

While keeping compliance guidance at the forefront, AHFA also was hard at work behind the scenes with an eye toward the future. Many emerging regulatory initiatives hinge on a greater degree of supply chain knowledge — an intense scrutiny of content and sourcing heretofore unpracticed in home furnishings production. Beginning at the Regulatory Summit in August and continuing with a special webinar in December, AHFA began laying a foundation of tools and resources to equip member companies to meet these compliance challenges of the future.

KEEPING MEMBERS PRIMED ON PFAS

AHFA devoted webinars, bulletins and a hefty chunk of the Regulatory Summit agenda in August to preparing companies to comply with the federal PFAS reporting requirement.

Passed in October 2023, the reporting requirement is designed to provide the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with the largest-ever dataset of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) manufactured and used in the United States. It directs manufacturers and importers of products that contain PFAS to report how much of that product they manufactured or imported since 2011, along with the function the PFAS served in the products and the concentration of PFAS in those products.

Most AHFA members will be considered "small importers" under the EPA's rule and, therefore, have until November 10, 2025, to complete this reporting. However, member companies were advised to begin the document collection and record-keeping measures in 2024 to ensure timely compliance. A presentation at the Regulatory Summit provided an outline for this process using a streamlined short reporting form.

In April 2024, the EPA designated two specific PFA substances – PFOA and PFOS – as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). This rule holds polluters responsible for cleaning up PFAS contamination. Legal experts presenting at the Summit advised upholstery manufacturers to conduct a risk audit that examines their supply chain and then develop a strategy for addressing any risk exposure identified.

The Summit also brought top scientists to provide member companies with timely updates on research to identify the impact of PFAS on human health and efforts underway to develop a test for PFAS in upholstered furniture and textiles. In addition, a report from ASTM updated attendees on the subcommittee working on a standard for PFAS testing.

Meanwhile, states continued passing and implementing their own PFAS regulations in 2024. Colorado and Connecticut enacted new legislation while Maine amended its law to skip PFAS reporting and move straight to a ban beginning January 1, 2026. California continued introducing and modifying PFAS-related legislation, but a law adopted in 2022 prohibits textile articles, including furnishings, from containing any PFAS beginning January 2025.

For several years, performance fabric manufacturers have been removing any PFAS-containing fabrics or finishes – if they had them – from their product line-up. By the end of 2024, the emphasis throughout the industry was on marketing "PFAS-free."

UTAH'S LAW LABEL DEBACLE

Confusion surrounding proposed online law labels in the State of Utah continued throughout the year with a resolution no closer in December than it was in January.

In April 2023, the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), which oversees labeling of bedding, furniture and quilted clothing sold in the state, adopted a requirement for law labels to be accessible to consumers prior to making an online purchase of upholstered furniture. Shortly thereafter, AHFA began working with Utah officials to try and address an oversight in the rule: it made no provision for special order upholstery for which a law label is not available at the time of order.

AHFA proposed allowing manufacturers of custom upholstery sold online to create a single text page listing all available filling options and a description of the materials in each option. Consumers would be able to access this page via a hyperlink in the product description.

After nearly a year of discussion, which included AHFA hosting senior UDAF staff on a tour of several North Carolina upholstery plants in December 2023, the state agreed to implement this solution. In February 2024, UDAF took action to delay implementation of the rule, giving themselves time to draft the new provision that AHFA had recommended.

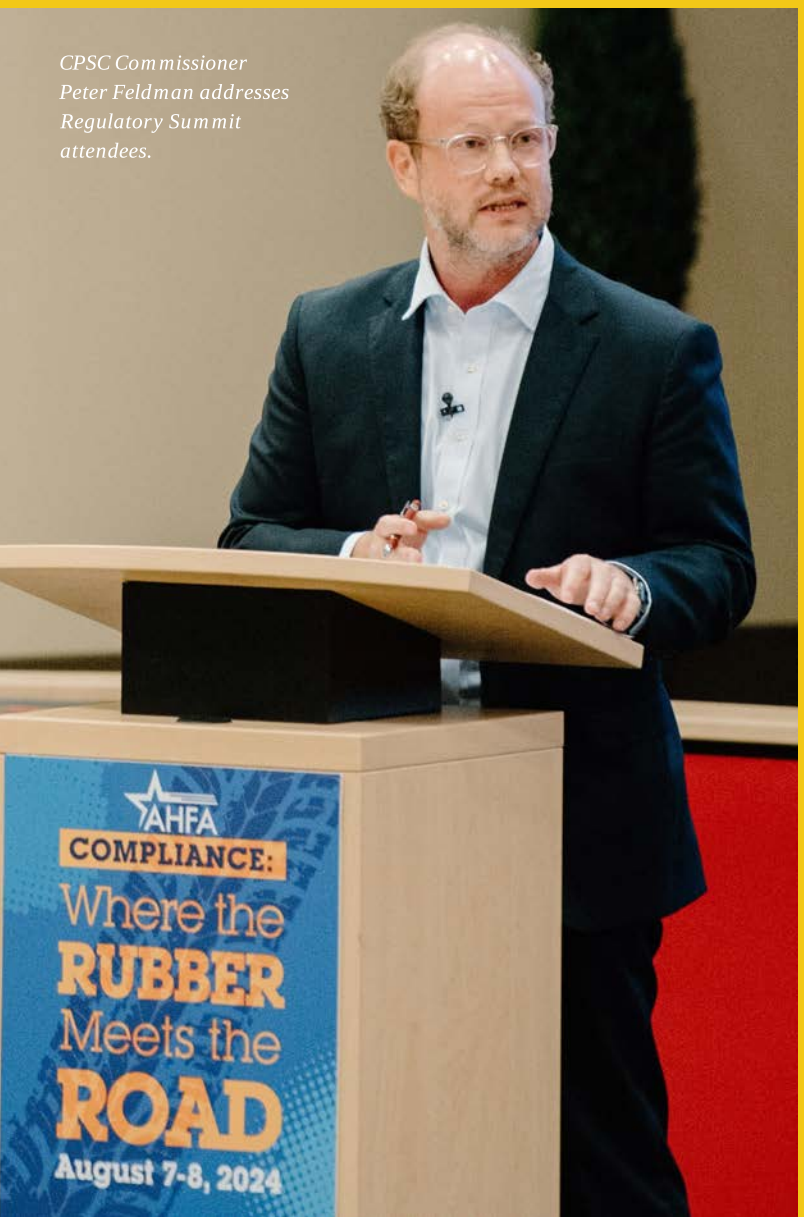
The revision was drafted and published in the State Bulletin in September. However, UDAF then determined that a separate statute pertaining to law labels contained a requirement for filling materials to be listed by percentage in order of predominance. Before the new rule could be finalized, the old one required a legislative update to remove this provision.

AHFA drafted the necessary legislative fix at the end of the year but had to wait until the new legislative session in January 2025 to have it introduced. Meanwhile, member companies continued contemplating compliance measures for online law labels that may or may not be required in Utah in 2025.

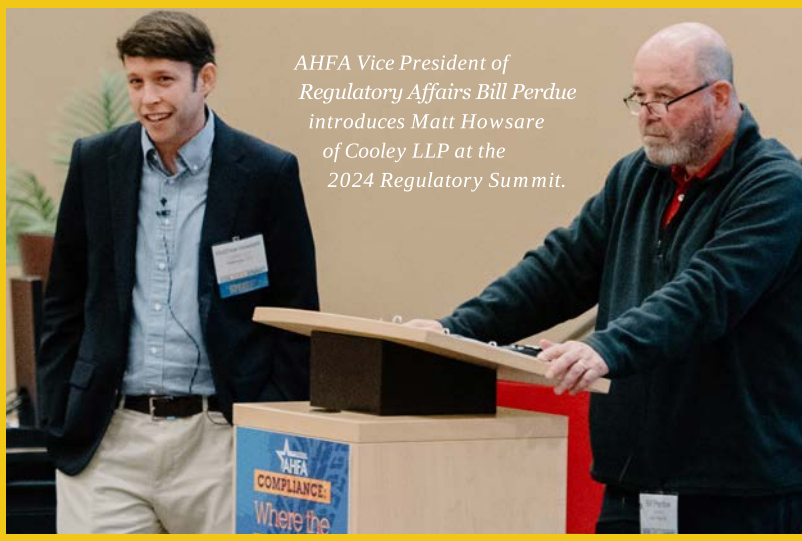
The law label quagmire in Utah demonstrates how quickly state initiatives can go sideways ... and the competitive advantage of having an advocate like AHFA at the table to educate state officials and make sure regulations are both effective and feasible.

A full auditorium at the August Regulatory Summit.

Andy Bray, Vanguard Furniture, and Caroline Hipple, Hooker Furnishings, at the May Board of Directors meeting.



CPSC Commissioner Peter Feldman addresses Regulatory Summit attendees.



AHFA Vice President of Regulatory Affairs Bill Perdue introduces Matt Howsare of Cooley LLP at the 2024 Regulatory Summit.

Board Member Travis Wagner, Ashley Furniture Industries, with Senator Ted Budd (R-NC) at the May Board of Directors Meeting.

AHFA FACILITATES TIP RESTRAINT RECALL

AHFA opened the year supporting more than 30 member companies by handling the logistics of a broad recall of plastic, zip tie-style tip restraints manufactured in Vietnam by New Age Industries.

AHFA broadened the focus of its Alliance4Safety website to manage the recall. Alliance4Safety was developed in 2020 to provide information and resources to help protect the health of home furnishings industry workers and preserve their jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic. While the pandemic-related resources remain on the site, AHFA added consumer health and safety information in January 2024, including steps consumers could take to replace recalled tip restraint kits.

Member companies impacted by the recall directed consumers to the Alliance4Safety website to request their free replacement tip kits. By the end of January, AHFA had mailed over 1,000 kits, and by the end of the year, over 3,000 were mailed.

In August, AHFA augmented the Alliance4Safety website again, this time adding resources for companies participating in Furniture Safety Week, along with home and product safety information for consumers.

FORMALDEHYDE FOREVER

Unlike PFAS, formaldehyde is not a "forever chemical." In fact, formaldehyde is quickly broken down in the air, usually within hours. For the furniture industry, however, it may be a "forever issue."

Ever since the California Air Resources Board listed formaldehyde as a "toxic air contaminant" in 1992 and named composite wood products as a "major source" of formaldehyde emissions, AHFA has been at the forefront of formaldehyde research in our industry.

When EPA designated formaldehyde as a "high priority substance" under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) in December 2019, triggering a mandatory risk evaluation of the chemical's impact on human health and the environment, AHFA was once again at the table on the industry's behalf. When the final scope of the risk evaluation was released eight months later, composite wood products already regulated under TSCA were exempt.

However, in an inexplicable reversal, when EPA released the final draft for the risk evaluation in March 2024, composite wood products were once again included. In May AHFA joined with the International Wood Products Association and National Retail Federation in submitting comments on the draft, including more than 60 pages of AHFA documents with monitoring data measuring formaldehyde exposure at several U.S. furniture production facilities.

When EPA released its final formaldehyde risk evaluation in December, the agency agreed with AHFA's position that TSCA-complaint products are not a risk and reversed course again. However, they named foam seating and mattresses as unreasonable risks – both not previously cited. These categories were not in the draft assessment and deeming them unreasonable risks ignored foam test data provided by AHFA in May.

AHFA closed 2024 exploring all available options to make sure furniture is not included in the EPA risk management rule for formaldehyde and any new workplace exposure limits are based on sound science.

SOLID GROUNDWORK

Week after week, month after month, AHFA is at work executing the mission of the Alliance to strengthen the industry as well as its individual members. The month-by-month recap of 2024 on the following pages spotlights the groundwork AHFA laid throughout the year through its advocacy, activities, programs and promotions.

The meticulously-tended groundwork of a private vineyard was the fitting backdrop for AHFA's 2024 Annual Meeting & CEO Conference at Estate Yountville in Napa Valley, which capped off a year of successful advocacy and action.

Photo: Estate Yountville

JANUARY

Nathan Cressman, president/CEO of Magnussen Home, takes the helm as chair of AHFA's Board of Directors, launching a year focused on the power of alliance to help member companies survive and thrive in turbulent times.

Eddie Massood of Massood Logistics begins his tenure as chair of AHFA's Solution Partners division, while Dan Hunt of Murrow's Transfer, steps up to lead the Specialized Furniture Carriers.

Megan Pierson, executive vice president of business development for POLYWOOD, is the 2025 chair of ICFA's Board of Directors and makes industry engagement plus creation of a women's leadership network among her top goals for the year. Jeremy Hodges, president of Hauser's Patio & Rattan in San Diego, California, is the new chair of ICFA's Retail Council, and Donn Raseman agrees to a second term as chair of the Sales Rep Council.

ICFA Executive Director Jackie Hirschhaut helps celebrate the opening of additional floors of outdoor showrooms at AmericasMart during the Winter Atlanta Market.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), AHFA's Alliance4Safety and 31 AHFA member companies and brands jointly announce the recall of millions of plastic zip tie-style tip restraints manufactured in Vietnam by New Age Industries Company Ltd. and attached to clothing storage furniture sold in U.S. stores and online since November 2019. Alliance4Safety handles all consumer inquiries for replacement tip kits on behalf of AHFA companies, mailing more than 1,000 kits by the end of the month.

FEBRUARY

ICFA adds Siri Scott to its management team as Director of Programs and Engagement. As a digital marketing specialist, Scott pledges to bring data-driven tools to the ICFA staff to track progress of new initiatives and drive their success.

The State of Utah temporarily postpones a new requirement for retailers to display a law label for upholstered furniture sold online. The action is in response to efforts by AHFA to provide a means for retailers of special order upholstery to comply with the requirement.

The annual Marketing/PR Conference returns after a seven-year hiatus. More than 70 marketing executives attend the day-and-a-half program featuring La-Z-Boy Chief Marketing Officer Christy Hoskins on reinventing the iconic brand to reach today's consumers.

ICFA holds its 2024 Educational Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona. More than 200 casual industry executives attend the two-and-a-half-day program. Dallas-based Sunnyland Outdoor Living receives the 2024 Mary Fruehauf Retail Genius Award and ANDMORE receives the 2024 Industry Partner Award.

MARCH

AHFA offers a webinar to review the requirements that importers will face under the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's proposed new e-filing requirement. For every product that is subject to a mandatory CPSC safety standard — like bunk beds and clothing storage units — importers will be required to file their certificates of compliance electronically.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency releases its draft risk evaluation for formaldehyde finding that the chemical poses unreasonable risk to human health. AHFA begins work with other stakeholder groups to draft comments.

ICFA establishes the Women's Leadership Network to encourage professional and personal development among women in the casual furnishings industry.

International Casual Furnishings Association
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK

APRIL

AHFA announces the first Furniture Safety Week will be October 7-11, 2024.

AHFA's Solution Partners division presents $35,000 in education scholarships to the children of industry workers. The awards include 12 $2,500 scholarships and one $5,000 scholarship, the latter being funded by Deliveright Logistics in memory of former employee Bill Hauck.

ICFA announces July and September market dates through 2027. In addition, the association leadership creates a schedule of special activities for the two 2024 markets, including retail roundtables, social events, awards presentations and seminars.

CASUAL MARKET ATLANTA

MAY

Alexander Hoehn-Saric (below), chair of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, addresses AHFA's Board of Directors during the annual government affairs meeting in Washington, D.C. Board members quiz the chair on enforcement plans for the new stabililty standard for clothing storage furniture, expressing concern that online sellers be held to the same standard as products sold in stores.

AHFA joins with the International Wood Products Association and the National Retail Federation to submit comments on the EPA's 2024 draft risk evaluation for formaldehyde. AHFA cautions that most AHFA members have operations that will be affected by the agency's determination that formaldehyde presents an "unreasonable risk" to human health. The submission includes furniture industry formaldehyde exposure data in more than 60 attached documents.

ICFA publishes its 2024 consumer research showing only 18 percent of Americans use their outdoor living space as much as they'd like. More than two-thirds of households report plans to purchase new outdoor furnishings in 2024.

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JUNE

LOGISTICS CONFERENCE 2024
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA • JUNE 17-19

The June Logistics Conference, sponsored by AHFA's Specialized Furniture Carriers division, is held in Charleston, South Carolina, attracting more than 100 executives from the industry's top transportation and logistics companies, manufacturers, importers, retailers and more. Industry icon and visionary Edward Massood receives the division's 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award.

AHFA's Specialized Furniture Carriers division announces it has created a new certification program that more clearly defines the division's membership criteria and distinguishes its members from general commodities carriers. A new application requires verification of areas of expertise, home furnishings industry volume and home furnishings-specific training.

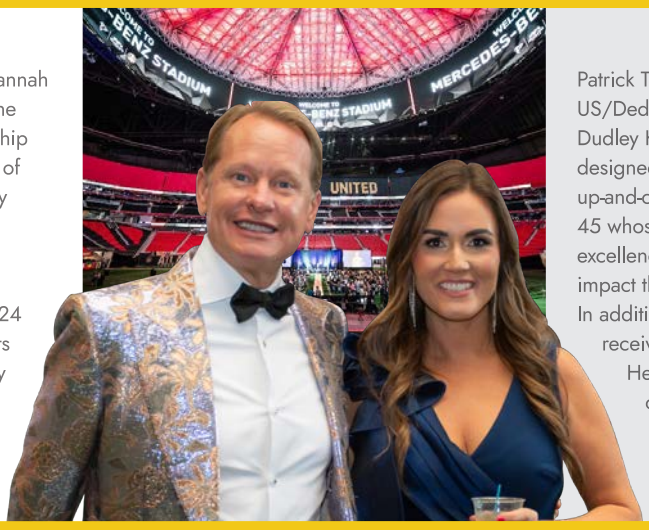
AHFA's Furniture Foundation awards $54,000 in educational grants for 2024. The largest recipient is Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory, North Carolina. The college receives $22,000 for its two furniture academies, which offer sewing and upholstery training for prospective furniture industry workers.

Happy Land, former sales manager for several casual furniture manufacturers and now a member of the retail staff at Custom Outdoor Furniture in Garden City, South Carolina, and Joseph Ziolkowski, who served as executive director of the Summer and Casual Furniture Manufacturers Association in the mid-80s, are announced as recipients of ICFA's 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award.

JULY

Scott Grove, a rising junior at the Savannah College of Art and Design, receives the ICFA/Richard Frinier Design Scholarship for "Seaside Sun-dance," a collection of five textile patterns designed for luxury hotel and cruise pool furniture.

ICFA recognizes manufacturing and retailing excellence and honors its 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award recipients at a gala awards celebration hosted by Carson Kressley (at right, with Megan Pierson) at Mercedes-Benz Stadium during Casual Market Atlanta.



Patrick Troy, president/CEO of Gloster US/Dedon, is the second recipient of the Dudley K. Flanders Leadership Award designed to recognize an outstanding, up-and-coming professional under age 45 whose actions demonstrate a quest for excellence and the potential to positively impact the outdoor furnishings industry. In addition, Terry DeMeuse of Lloyd Flanders receives the 2024 ICFA Mia Nault Unsung Hero Award for exceptional customer service.

AUGUST

AHFA welcomes CPSC Commissioner Peter Feldman as keynote presenter for its 2024 Regulatory Summit. Feldman commends AHFA for its commitment to product safety and its ongoing engagement with CPSC. More than 150 industry executives attend.

AHFA combines forces with CertiPUR-US to shoot a product safety video news release designed to air during Furniture Safety Week in October. The two-minute video provides five home safety tips for consumers, with a focus on furniture tip-over prevention, bunk bed safety, recliner safety, chemical-free mattresses and glass-top table safety.

SEPTEMBER

More than 100 golfers come out under cloudy skies to support the 2024 Solution Partners Education Golf Tournament at Lake Hickory Country Club in Hickory, North Carolina. Craftmaster's foursome (at left) takes home the first place honors.

AHFA launches a fall webinar series to provide additional guidance on e-filing requirements for importers, PFAS reporting and more.

ICFA presents the 2024 Lillian B. Winchester "Best of Show" award to TUUCI for its Ocean Master M1 Voilare umbrella (shown on page 14), along with trophies to 10 companies for Design Excellence category awards.

ICFA invites Fall Casual Market Atlanta attendees to walk the AmericasMart casual furniture floors to benefit City of Hope, the Duarte, California-based cancer research center and hospital.

OCTOBER

As part of the ICFA Membership Meeting and Planning Workshop in Los Angeles, a 30-member delegation of ICFA members travels to City of Hope in Duarte. The visit includes a tour of the massive campus. Chair Megan Pierson presented a check for over $47,000, moving ICFA's City of Hope fundraising to just over $200,000 since 2017.

Andy Counts receives the Pillar of the Industry Award from the International Home Furnishings Representatives Association, the group's highest honor.

AHFA sponsors the inaugural Furniture Safety Week engaging all segments of the industry along with child safety advocates and consumer safety organizations in an effort to promote home safety messages focused on furniture. A video news release shares Furniture Safety Week tips with more than 700,000 consumers in 20 different markets across the U.S.

NOVEMBER

ICFA announces a revised mission and updated vision statement following a strategic planning meeting in October. Increased retail membership, improved internal messaging and a new external communications program are key goals for the coming year.

ICFA sponsors the Georgia Design Awards by *Atlanta Magazine's HOME*.

AHFA holds its Annual Meeting and CEO Conference at The Estate Yountville in Yountville, California. Andy Bray, president of Vanguard Furniture, is elected chair of AHFA's 2025 Board of Directors.

At a gala awards dinner, Jeb Bassett, senior vice president and chief operating officer at Bassett Furniture (below center), is presented with AHFA's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award, by Andy Counts and Farooq Kathwari.

DECEMBER

AHFA hires Gene Clark (below left) as vice president of membership and associate member relations. He brings more than 35 years of industry experience to the post. In addition, Alex Williams is hired as manager of sustainability and regulatory compliance to expand AHFA's government affairs coverage.

CPSC approves its final rule to implement electronic filing (e-filing) for imported products that are subject to a mandatory CPSC regulation. The implementation date is extended from 12 to 18 months, meaning the deadline for furniture importers to comply will be in July 2026. AHFA encourages members to participate in the voluntary compliance program set to begin immediately.

By year's end, AHFA's Alliance4Safety has mailed 3,059 replacement tip restraint kits on behalf of its member companies.

REQUEST
a free replacement tip restraint

UDAF

Utah officials finalize an online law label requirement in October, and some e-commerce retailers begin taking steps to meet its May 15, 2025, effective date. Behind the scenes, however, AHFA learns there is a new snag: A separate regulation requires law label contents to be listed by percentage, once again leaving special order upholstery with no viable compliance path. AHFA drafts a legislative fix and anticipates a resolution when Utah's legislature is back in session in January.

PILLARS OF SUPPORT

AHFA's diverse membership includes a vast array of service and product suppliers that sponsor and support programs designed to advance our industry's growth and success. By providing essential information, expertise and partnership on critical industry issues, these Solution Partners augment AHFA's services and resources.

A second AHFA division, the International Casual Furnishings Association, meets the unique needs of outdoor furniture manufacturers, importers, retailers and suppliers. Outdoor and casual furnishings have never been more in demand, and ICFA continues to grow in scope and influence.

These two affiliates undergird their specialized memberships and provide the steady leadership needed for long-term sustainability in our industry.

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SOLUTION PARTNERS DIVISION EXPANDS, SHARPENS FOCUS

AHFA's Solution Partners division dedicated 2024 to expanding services to its diverse membership and sharpening the focus of its Specialized Furniture Carriers group.

Planning for the June Logistics Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, was underway early and highlighted the digital and AI transformation underway within the logistics industry and its future impact on the supply chain and transportation sectors. A timely keynote presentation from Alex Weber, a former "American Ninja Warrior" competitor, urged attendees to become relentless in attaining their goals and outlined empowering steps for confronting challenges along the way. Presentation of the Specialized Furniture Carriers 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award to Edward Massood was fitting, as his 50-year career has been distinguished by his relentless pursuit of excellence while modeling integrity, humility and resilience.

Solution Partners Executive Director Mike Padjen presented the Specialized Furniture Carriers Lifetime Achievement Award to Eddie Massood, Massood Logistics.

Qarma CEO Jacob Nedergaard confers with Glenn Felterman, Riverside, and Jay Johnson, Avalon Furniture, in the Exhibit Hall at the Regulatory Summit.

The Lectra special refreshment pavilion, a favorite spot for tournament golfers, was hosted by Heather Corrigan and David Fowkes.

After nearly a year of planning, the Specialized Furniture Carriers announced an ambitious new certification program in May designed to more clearly distinguish its members from general commodities carriers. The new application process was introduced by year's end with the goal of certifying the first applicants in 2025.

The division awarded another 12 scholarships in 2024, bringing the total number of awards presented since the program was launched in 2000 to 183 and the dollar amount distributed to over $404,000. Supported by the Annual Solution Partners Education Golf Tournament in September, it remains the only scholarship program dedicated to supporting the children of industry workers. The 2024 golf tournament was sold out once again, with over 100 golfers participating.

A leadership transition at the end of the year included the retirement of Mike Padjen as Solution Partners Executive Director and the promotion of Gene Clark into that role.

Enjoying the cocktail hour at the 2024 Logistics Conference are Madison Freedman, Lightning Transportation; Javier Colmenares, Samson Marketing; and Tyler Bemis, the Port of Virginia.

EXPANDED MEMBER EVENTS AND SERVICES HIGHLIGHT ICFA'S YEAR

When Megan Pierson stepped up as chair of ICFA's Board of Directors in January, she did so with a robust list of goals that included supporting multi-generational leadership within the association, creating a women's leadership council and continuing to build the ICFA membership into a "rich community of thought leaders." All of these goals were advanced during her year at the helm.

The year began with the addition of Siri Scott as Director of Programs and Engagement, a new position designed to enhance support of existing members while expanding ICFA's influence.

In February, the annual Educational Conference at Hotel Valley Ho in Scottsdale, Arizona, featured keynote presenter Betsy Allen-Manning, a corporate culture expert, author, podcast host and business consultant. More than 200 industry executives representing manufacturers, importers, retailers, suppliers, designers and sales representatives attended the four-day event, which has grown each year in scope and impact. It also provided the backdrop for naming ANDMORE Industry Partner of the Year and Dallas-based Sunnyland the recipient of the 2024 Mary Fruehauf Retail Genius Award.

In April, ICFA approved market dates through the year 2027 and announced a full roster of member events for both the July and September Atlanta markets. Beginning with a pre-market "Retailer Roundtable & Think Tank" forum, the mid-July Casual Market Atlanta included an ICFA Birthday Bash and a "Pink Out" day to raise money for City of Hope. The capstone of the summer market was the Gala Awards Dinner at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Happy Land and Joseph Ziolkowski were honored with Lifetime Achievement Award recognition videos, Terry DeMuse of Lloyd Flanders received the Mia Nault Unsung Hero Award, and Patrick Troy of Dedon/Gloster received the Dudley K. Flanders Leadership Award.

ICFA staged the official launch of its Women's Leadership Network at the summer market, a forum to provide educational programs, peer-to-peer learning, mentorship circles and more with an after-hours social in the ICFA Member Lounge. In addition, the association hosted Scott Grove at Summer Casual Market Atlanta. The Savannah College of Art and Design rising junior was awarded the ICFA/Richard Frinier Design Scholarship for his collection of five textile patterns for luxury poolside furnishings.

A second Retailer Roundtable & Think Tank, along with a Women's Leadership Network breakfast, followed at Fall Casual Market Atlanta in September, as well as a "Braves & Brews" event for members at Truist Park. An awards party included a display of Design Excellence category winners and honored Apollo Award recipients Bucks Country Gardens of Doylestown, Pennsylvania, and Kolo Collection of Atlanta, as well as Castelle as Manufacturer of the Year and Joe Crandall as Sales Representative of the Year. And another fundraising effort, the fall Walk for Hope, once again channeled donations to City of Hope.

In October, ICFA took steps toward reaching its goal to expand the membership by adding Candy Chase as the western sales manager and Jill Schiff as eastern sales manager. Then, as part of its fall Membership and Planning Workshop held in Los Angeles, the Board adopted updated organization mission and vision statements and set objectives for 2025 and beyond. As part of the workshop itinerary, the board visited the Duarte, California-based City of Hope, where they presented a check for over $47,000 in 2024 casual industry donations.

Amanda Smith, Patios Plus; Sebastian Manni, Kannoa; Becky Smith, Kannoa; and Zach Atwell, Global Registration Services at the ICFA Educational Conference at Hotel Valley Ho in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Kathleen Ferry, Claire Walvick and Jess Flanders, all with Lloyd Flanders, at the Women's Leadership Network Breakfast in September.

Audience participation at the 2024 ICFA Educational Conference.

LOOKING AHEAD

Donald Trump campaigned on dramatically raising tariffs as the focal point of his trade policy — and began targeting China, Mexico and Canada on his first day in office. As a result, 2025 commenced with uncertainty around tariff levels, potential for retaliation and the anticipated net impact on the U.S. home furnishings market, as well as on U.S. consumers more broadly.

Advancements in AI, accelerated state regulation and ongoing global logistics challenges all promise to shape AHFA's efforts to serve the industry in 2025. But it is clear tariffs — and the debates (and possible trade wars) they spark — will be the defining issue in the year to come.

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AHFA LAYS FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE SUCCESSES

AHFA's goals for 2025 focus on expanding an array of opportunities for networking and knowledge-sharing; strengthening watchdog resources on the state level; shoring up industry science supporting our positions on chemical regulation; and expanding membership to back these endeavors.

- The direct impact of tariffs on AHFA member companies will vary throughout the year depending on each member's level of trade and supply chain exposure. As companies navigate this rocky terrain, AHFA will support all members through its conferences, webinars and forums where shared insights can help highlight best practices and sound strategies for managing business during times of economic uncertainty.

- The expansion of AHFA's regulatory affairs staff at the end of 2024 with the addition of Alex Williams not only recognized the increasing complexity of federal regulation but also the growing specter of fragmented state activity on environmental, health and safety concerns.

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released its final risk evaluation for formaldehyde as expected in the first days of 2025, and its conclusions ensured AHFA would continue to devote resources to the study of formaldehyde and exposure limits for industry workers.

- Finally, AHFA's plans to step up member recruitment efforts are designed to fortify its ability to continue providing the tools, resources and advocacy needed for both individual member success and broader industry achievement.

ICFA

Under the mantra "Bigger, Better, Stronger," ICFA has several new initiatives in place to make 2025 a year of growth, enhanced member engagement and stronger partnerships. A proactive, multi-faceted approach to membership development includes a robust travel incentive program offsetting hotel costs for retailers attending the summer or fall Casual Market Atlanta. A new, comprehensive show guide for ICFA members will help them explore complementary products at the markets, and a full menu of educational and networking opportunities promises to support connections during the two markets. A new digital monthly newsletter will launch in early 2025 to improve association communications, and additional email updates will keep members on top of events and news. Finally, the ICFA Benefits Task Force plans efforts in 2025 to improve key offerings that benefit both member businesses and their teams, including partnerships with other associations and ICFA's supplier members.

SOLUTION PARTNERS

Healthy growth propelled the Solution Partners division into 2025, with 18 new members joining in 2024. Rapid growth in the number of companies offering 3-D imaging and visualization services is expected to fuel continued division growth in coming months. New Solution Partners benefits designed to better serve these supplier companies include a webinar series planned for the second half of 2025. These webinars will allow suppliers to share their areas of expertise while providing member manufacturers and importers with relevant educational content. Efforts also continue to build awareness of the Solution Partners Scholarship Program. A streamlined online application made its debut in 2024 and will help to facilitate the application process going forward.

SPECIALIZED FURNITURE CARRIERS

The Specialized Furniture Carriers division will finish establishing necessary protocols for its certification program in 2025 and will begin promoting the carriers who have completed the program. Special effort will be devoted to building attendance at the June Logistics Conference in Asheville, which will help support recovery efforts within the city and surrounding counties in the aftermath of 2024's Hurricane Helene.

THE MISSION OF THE AMERICAN HOME FURNISHINGS ALLIANCE IS TO PROMOTE THE GROWTH AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP OF ITS MEMBER COMPANIES BY:

- *Providing exceptional advocacy;*
- *Promoting effective product and safety standards;*
- *Presenting relevant education; and*
- *Serving as the preeminent media resource on industry news and trends.*

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