

MAY 20 2011

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MARIN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
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CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
10 COUNTY OF MARIN

12 CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH,)
13 a non-profit corporation,)
14 Plaintiff,)
15 v.)
16 99 CENTS ONLY STORES; and DOES 1)
17 through 200, inclusive,)
18 Defendants.)

Case No. CIV 1102580

**COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE
RELIEF AND CIVIL PENALTIES**

Health & Safety Code § 25249.6, *et seq.*
(Other)

1 Plaintiff Center for Environmental Health, in the public interest, based on
2 information and belief and investigation of counsel, except for information based on knowledge,
3 hereby makes the following allegations:

4 **INTRODUCTION**

5 1. This Complaint seeks to remedy Defendants' continuing failure to warn
6 individuals in California that they are being exposed to lead and lead compounds (collectively,
7 "Lead"), chemicals known to the State of California to cause cancer and birth defects and other
8 reproductive harm. Such exposures have occurred, and continue to occur, through the
9 manufacture, distribution, sale and use of Defendants' Halloween Vinyl Devil's Pitchfork (the
10 "Product"). Consumers, including pregnant women and children, are exposed to Lead when they
11 use, touch or handle the Product.

12 2. Under California's Proposition 65, Health & Safety Code § 25249.5, *et*
13 *seq.*, it is unlawful for businesses to knowingly and intentionally expose individuals in California
14 to chemicals known to the State to cause cancer, birth defects or other reproductive harm without
15 providing clear and reasonable warnings to individuals prior to their exposure. Defendants
16 introduce the Product contaminated with significant quantities of Lead into the California
17 marketplace, exposing consumers of their Product, many of whom are pregnant women and
18 children, to Lead.

19 3. Despite the fact that Defendants expose pregnant women, children and
20 other consumers to Lead, Defendants provide no warnings whatsoever about the carcinogenic or
21 reproductive hazards associated with Lead exposure. Defendants' conduct thus violates the
22 warning provision of Proposition 65. Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

23 **PARTIES**

24 4. Plaintiff CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ("CEH") is a
25 non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting the public from environmental health hazards and
26 toxic exposures. CEH is based in Oakland, California and incorporated under the laws of the
27 State of California. CEH is a "person" within the meaning of Health & Safety Code
28 § 25249.11(a) and brings this enforcement action in the public interest pursuant to Health &

1 the violations arise in the County of Marin.

2 **BACKGROUND FACTS**

3 12. The People of the State of California have declared by initiative under
4 Proposition 65 their right “[t]o be informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth
5 defects, or other reproductive harm.” Proposition 65, § 1(b).

6 13. To effectuate this goal, Proposition 65 prohibits exposing people to
7 chemicals listed by the State of California as known to cause cancer, birth defects or other
8 reproductive harm above certain levels without a “clear and reasonable warning” unless the
9 business responsible for the exposure can prove that it fits within a statutory exemption. Health
10 & Safety Code § 25249.6 states, in pertinent part:

11 No person in the course of doing business shall knowingly and
12 intentionally expose any individual to a chemical known to the
13 state to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity without first giving
14 clear and reasonable warning to such individual. . .

15 14. On February 27, 1987, the State of California officially listed lead as a
16 chemical known to cause reproductive toxicity. Lead is specifically identified as a reproductive
17 toxicant under three subcategories: “developmental reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to
18 the developing fetus, “female reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the female
19 reproductive system, and “male reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the male
20 reproductive system. 27 California Code of Regulations (“C.C.R.”) § 27001(c). On February 27,
21 1988, one year after it was listed as a chemical known to cause reproductive toxicity, lead
22 became subject to the clear and reasonable warning requirement regarding reproductive toxicants
23 under Proposition 65. *Ibid.*; Health & Safety Code § 25249.10(b).

24 15. On October 1, 1992, the State of California officially listed lead and lead
25 compounds as chemicals known to cause cancer. On October 1, 1993, one year after they were
26 listed as chemicals known to cause cancer, lead and lead compounds became subject to the clear
27 and reasonable warning requirement regarding carcinogens under Proposition 65. 27 C.C.R.
28 § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code § 25249.10(b).

16. Young children are especially susceptible to the toxic effects of Lead.

1 Children show a greater sensitivity to Lead's effects than do adults. Adverse health impacts from
2 Lead exposure generally occur in children at lower blood Lead levels than in adults. Children
3 absorb and retain more Lead in proportion to their weight than do adults. Young children also
4 show a greater prevalence of iron deficiency, a condition that can increase gastrointestinal
5 absorption of Lead. The body accumulates Lead over a lifetime and releases it slowly, so even
6 small doses received in childhood, over time, can cause adverse health impacts, including but not
7 limited to reproductive toxicity, later in life. For example, in times of physiological stress, such
8 as pregnancy, the body can mobilize accumulated stores of Lead in tissue and bone, thereby
9 increasing the level of Lead in the blood and increasing the risk of harm to the fetus.

10 17. There is no safe level of exposure to Lead and even minute amounts of
11 Lead exposure have been proven harmful to children and adults. Studies have repeatedly
12 concluded that concentrations of Lead in children's blood previously deemed acceptable can
13 have adverse health effects. *See, e.g.,* Canfield, R.L., *et al.*, "Intellectual Impairment in Children
14 with Blood Lead Concentrations below 10 ug per Deciliter," *New England Journal of Medicine*
15 348:16, 2003. Another study on the effect of childhood Lead exposure declared that even the
16 smallest detectable amount of blood Lead levels in children can mean the difference between an
17 A or B grade in school. Lanphear, B.P., Dietrich, K., Auinger, P., Cox, C., "Subclinical Lead
18 Toxicity in U.S. Children and Adolescents," *Neurodevelopmental Disabilities II Platform*, 2000.

19 18. Lead exposures for pregnant women are also of particular concern in light
20 of evidence that even short term lead exposures *in utero* may have long-term harmful effects.
21 Hu, H., *et al.*, "Fetal Lead Exposure at Each State of Pregnancy as a Predictor of Infant Mental
22 Development," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 114:11, 2006; Schnaas, Lourdes, *et al.*,
23 "Reduced Intellectual Development in Children with Prenatal Lead Exposure," *Environmental*
24 *Health Perspectives* 114:5, 2006.

25 19. Defendants' Product contains sufficient quantities of Lead such that
26 consumers, including pregnant women and children, who touch or handle the Product are
27 exposed to Lead through the average use of the Product. The routes of exposure for the
28 violations are ingestion via hand-to-mouth contact after consumers touch or handle the Product;

1 direct ingestion when consumers place the Product in their mouths; and dermal absorption
2 directly through the skin when consumers touch or handle the Product. These consumer
3 exposures to Lead occur in homes, workplaces and everywhere else throughout California where
4 the Product is touched, handled or used.

5 20. No clear and reasonable warning is provided with the Product regarding
6 the carcinogenic or reproductive hazards of Lead.

7 21. Any person acting in the public interest has standing to enforce violations
8 of Proposition 65 provided that such person has supplied the requisite public enforcers with a
9 valid 60-Day Notice of Violation and such public enforcers are not diligently prosecuting the
10 action within such time. Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d).

11 22. More than sixty days prior to naming each Defendant in this lawsuit, CEH
12 provided a 60-Day "Notice of Violation of Proposition 65" to the California Attorney General,
13 the District Attorneys of every county in California, the City Attorneys of every California city
14 with a population greater than 750,000 and to each of the named Defendants. In compliance with
15 Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 27 C.C.R. § 25903(b), each Notice included the
16 following information: (1) the name and address of each violator; (2) the statute violated; (3) the
17 time period during which violations occurred; (4) specific descriptions of the violations,
18 including (a) the routes of exposure to Lead from the Product, and (b) the name of the Product
19 sold and used in violation of Proposition 65; and (5) the name of the specific Proposition 65-
20 listed chemical that is the subject of the violations described in each Notice.

21 23. CEH also sent a Certificate of Merit for each Notice to the California
22 Attorney General, the District Attorneys of every county in California, the City Attorneys of
23 every California city with a population greater than 750,000 and to each of the named
24 Defendants. In compliance with Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3101, each
25 Certificate certified that CEH's counsel: (1) has consulted with one or more persons with
26 relevant and appropriate experience or expertise who reviewed facts, studies or other data
27 regarding the exposures to Lead alleged in each Notice; and (2) based on the information
28 obtained through such consultations, believes that there is a reasonable and meritorious case for a

1 citizen enforcement action based on the facts alleged in each Notice. In compliance with Health
2 & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3102, each Certificate served on the Attorney
3 General included factual information – provided on a confidential basis – sufficient to establish
4 the basis for the Certificate, including the identity of the person(s) consulted by CEH’s counsel
5 and the facts, studies or other data reviewed by such persons.

6 24. None of the public prosecutors with the authority to prosecute violations
7 of Proposition 65 has commenced and/or is diligently prosecuting a cause of action against
8 Defendants under Health & Safety Code § 25249.5, *et seq.*, based on the claims asserted in each
9 of CEH’s Notices.

10 25. Defendants both know and intend that individuals, including pregnant
11 women and children, will use, touch or handle the Product, thus exposing them to Lead.

12 26. Under Proposition 65, an exposure is “knowing” where the party
13 responsible for such exposure has:

14 knowledge of the fact that a[n] . . . exposure to a chemical listed
15 pursuant to [Health & Safety Code § 25249.8(a)] is occurring. No
16 knowledge that the . . . exposure is unlawful is required.

17 27 C.C.R. § 25102(n). This knowledge may be either actual or constructive. *See, e.g.*, Final
18 Statement of Reasons Revised (November 4, 1988) (pursuant to former 22 C.C.R. Division 2,
19 § 12201).

20 27. Defendants have been informed of the Lead in their Product by the 60-Day
21 Notice of Violation and accompanying Certificate of Merit served on them by CEH.

22 28. Defendants also have constructive knowledge that their Product contains
23 Lead due to the widespread media coverage concerning the problem of Lead in consumer
24 products in general and in products made of vinyl in particular. The use of Lead in children’s
25 products made from vinyl has been further publicized with the passage of the federal Consumer
26 Product Safety Improvement Act (“CPSIA”) in 2008. Although the CPSIA sets strict Lead
27 content limits for all children’s products, Defendants continue to manufacture, distribute, and/or
28 sell the Product with substantial quantities of Lead, quantities that far exceed the limits imposed

1 by the CPSIA.

2 29. As companies that manufacture, import, distribute and/or sell the Product
3 for use in the California marketplace, Defendants know or should know that the Product contains
4 Lead and that individuals who use the Product will be exposed to Lead. The Lead exposures to
5 consumers who use the Product are a natural and foreseeable consequence of Defendants'
6 placing the Product into the stream of commerce.

7 30. Nevertheless, Defendants continue to expose consumers, including
8 pregnant women and children, to Lead without prior clear and reasonable warnings regarding the
9 carcinogenic or reproductive hazards of Lead.

10 31. CEH has engaged in good-faith efforts to resolve the claims alleged herein
11 prior to filing this Complaint.

12 32. Any person "violating or threatening to violate" Proposition 65 may be
13 enjoined in any court of competent jurisdiction. Health & Safety Code § 25249.7. "Threaten to
14 violate" is defined to mean "to create a condition in which there is a substantial probability that a
15 violation will occur." Health & Safety Code § 25249.11(e). Proposition 65 provides for civil
16 penalties not to exceed \$2,500 per day for each violation of Proposition 65.

17 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

18 **(Violations of the Health & Safety Code § 25249.6)**

19 33. CEH realleges and incorporates by reference as if specifically set forth
20 herein Paragraphs 1 through 32, inclusive.

21 34. By placing the Product into the stream of commerce, each Defendant is a
22 person in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11.

23 35. Lead is a chemical listed by the State of California as known to cause
24 cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm.

25 36. Defendants know that average use of the Product will expose users of the
26 Product to Lead. Defendants intend that the Product be used in a manner that results in
27 exposures to Lead from the Product.

28 37. Defendants have failed, and continue to fail, to provide clear and

1 reasonable warnings regarding the carcinogenicity and reproductive toxicity of Lead to users of
2 the Product.

3 38. By committing the acts alleged above, Defendants have at all times
4 relevant to this Complaint violated Proposition 65 by knowingly and intentionally exposing
5 individuals to Lead without first giving clear and reasonable warnings to such individuals
6 regarding the carcinogenicity and reproductive toxicity of Lead.

7 Wherefore, CEH prays for judgment against Defendants, as set forth hereafter.

8 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

9 Wherefore, CEH prays for judgment against Defendants as follows:

10 1. That the Court, pursuant to Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(b), assess
11 civil penalties against each of the Defendants in the amount of \$2,500 per day for each violation
12 of Proposition 65 according to proof;

13 2. That the Court, pursuant to Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(a),
14 preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendants from offering the Product for sale in California
15 without providing prior clear and reasonable warnings, as CEH shall specify in further
16 application to the Court;

17 3. That the Court, pursuant to Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(a), order
18 Defendants to take action to stop ongoing unwarned exposures to Lead resulting from use of the
19 Product sold by Defendants, as CEH shall specify in further application to the Court;

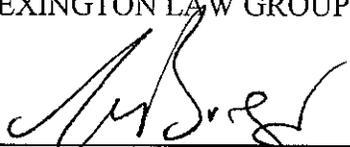
20 4. That the Court, pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5 or any other
21 applicable theory, grant CEH its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs of suit; and

22 5. That the Court grant such other and further relief as may be just and
23 proper.

24 Dated: May 20, 2011

Respectfully submitted,

25 LEXINGTON LAW GROUP

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28 Lisa Bürger
Attorneys for Plaintiff
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH