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CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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

13 CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH,)
14 a non-profit corporation,)

15 Plaintiff,)

16 v.)

17 99 CENTS ONLY STORES; BEST BUY CO.,)
18 INC.; BEST BUY STORES, L.P.; GEOFFREY,)
19 "R" US, INC.; and DOES 1 through 200,)
20 inclusive,)

21 Defendants.)
22 _____)
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Case No. CW 1102577 -

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' reusable shopping bags (the "Products").
10 Consumers, including pregnant women and children, are exposed to Lead when they use, touch
11 or handle the Products.

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 Products contaminated with significant quantities of Lead into the California
17 marketplace, exposing consumers of their Products, 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 Safety Code § 25249.7(d). CEH is a nationally recognized non-profit environmental advocacy
2 group that has prosecuted a large number of Proposition 65 cases in the public interest. These
3 cases have resulted in significant public benefit, including the reformulation of thousands of
4 products to remove toxic chemicals and to make them safer. CEH also provides information to
5 Californians about the health risks associated with exposure to hazardous substances, where
6 manufacturers and other responsible parties fail to do so.

7 5. Defendant 99 CENTS ONLY STORES is a person in the course of doing
8 business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. 99 Cents Only Stores
9 manufactures, distributes and/or sells the Products for sale and use in California.

10 6. Defendant BEST BUY CO., INC. is a person in the course of doing
11 business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. Best Buy Co., Inc.
12 manufactures, distributes and/or sells the Products for sale and use in California.

13 7. Defendant BEST BUY STORES, L.P. is a person in the course of doing
14 business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. Best Buy Stores, L.P.
15 manufactures, distributes and/or sells the Products for sale and use in California.

16 8. Defendant GEOFFREY, LLC is a person in the course of doing business
17 within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. Geoffrey, LLC manufactures,
18 distributes and/or sells the Products for sale and use in California.

19 9. Defendant MOMENTUM BRANDS, INC. is a person in the course of
20 doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. Momentum Brands,
21 Inc. manufactures, distributes and/or sells the Products for sale and use in California.

22 10. Defendant TOYS "R" US, INC. is a person in the course of doing business
23 within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. Toys "R" Us, Inc. manufactures,
24 distributes and/or sells the Products for sale and use in California.

25 11. DOES 1 through 200 are each a person in the course of doing business
26 within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. DOES 1 through 200 manufacture,
27 distribute and/or sell the Products for sale or use in California.

28 12. The true names of DOES 1 through 200 are unknown to CEH at this time.

1 When their identities are ascertained, the Complaint shall be amended to reflect their true names.

2 13. The defendants identified in paragraphs 5 through 10 and DOES 1 through
3 200 are collectively referred to herein as "Defendants."

4 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

5 14. The Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Health & Safety
6 Code § 25249.7, which allows enforcement in any court of competent jurisdiction, and pursuant
7 to California Constitution Article VI, Section 10, because this case is a cause not given by statute
8 to other trial courts.

9 15. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because each is a business
10 entity that does sufficient business, has sufficient minimum contacts in California or otherwise
11 intentionally avails itself of the California market through the sale, marketing or use of the
12 Products in California and/or by having such other contacts with California so as to render the
13 exercise of jurisdiction over it by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair
14 play and substantial justice.

15 16. Venue is proper in the Marin County Superior Court because one or more of
16 the violations arise in the County of Marin.

17 **BACKGROUND FACTS**

18 17. The People of the State of California have declared by initiative under
19 Proposition 65 their right "[t]o be informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth
20 defects, or other reproductive harm." Proposition 65, § 1(b).

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

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

1 19. On February 27, 1987, the State of California officially listed lead as a
2 chemical known to cause reproductive toxicity. Lead is specifically identified as a reproductive
3 toxicant under three subcategories: “developmental reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to
4 the developing fetus, “female reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the female
5 reproductive system, and “male reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the male
6 reproductive system. 27 California Code of Regulations (“C.C.R.”) § 27001(c). On February 27,
7 1988, one year after it was listed as a chemical known to cause reproductive toxicity, lead
8 became subject to the clear and reasonable warning requirement regarding reproductive toxicants
9 under Proposition 65. *Ibid.*; Health & Safety Code § 25249.10(b).

10 20. On October 1, 1992, the State of California officially listed lead and lead
11 compounds as chemicals known to cause cancer. On October 1, 1993, one year after they were
12 listed as chemicals known to cause cancer, lead and lead compounds became subject to the clear
13 and reasonable warning requirement regarding carcinogens under Proposition 65. 27 C.C.R.
14 § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code § 25249.10(b).

15 21. Young children are especially susceptible to the toxic effects of Lead.
16 Children show a greater sensitivity to Lead’s effects than do adults. Adverse health impacts from
17 Lead exposure generally occur in children at lower blood Lead levels than in adults. Children
18 absorb and retain more Lead in proportion to their weight than do adults. Young children also
19 show a greater prevalence of iron deficiency, a condition that can increase gastrointestinal
20 absorption of Lead. The body accumulates Lead over a lifetime and releases it slowly, so even
21 small doses received in childhood, over time, can cause adverse health impacts, including but not
22 limited to reproductive toxicity, later in life. For example, in times of physiological stress, such
23 as pregnancy, the body can mobilize accumulated stores of Lead in tissue and bone, thereby
24 increasing the level of Lead in the blood and increasing the risk of harm to the fetus.

25 22. There is no safe level of exposure to Lead and even minute amounts of
26 Lead exposure have been proven harmful to children and adults. Studies have repeatedly
27 concluded that concentrations of Lead in children’s blood previously deemed acceptable can
28 have adverse health effects. *See, e.g.,* Canfield, R.L., *et al.*, “Intellectual Impairment in Children

1 with Blood Lead Concentrations below 10 ug per Deciliter,” *New England Journal of Medicine*
2 348:16, 2003. Another study on the effect of childhood Lead exposure declared that even the
3 smallest detectable amount of blood Lead levels in children can mean the difference between an
4 A or B grade in school. Lanphear, B.P., Dietrich, K., Auinger, P., Cox, C., “Subclinical Lead
5 Toxicity in U.S. Children and Adolescents,” *Neurodevelopmental Disabilities II Platform*, 2000.

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

12 24. Defendants’ Products contain sufficient quantities of Lead such that
13 consumers, including pregnant women and children, who touch or handle the Products are
14 exposed to Lead through the average use of the Products. The routes of exposure for the
15 violations are direct ingestion when consumers (including pregnant women and children) place
16 the Products or items that have been stored in the Products in their mouths; ingestion via hand-
17 to-mouth contact after consumers touch or handle the Products or items that have been stored in
18 the Products; and dermal absorption directly through the skin when consumers touch or handle
19 the Products or items that have been stored in the Products. These exposures occur in homes,
20 workplaces and everywhere else throughout California where these Products are handled or used.

21 25. No clear and reasonable warning is provided with the Products regarding
22 the carcinogenic or reproductive hazards of Lead.

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

27 27. More than sixty days prior to naming each Defendant in this lawsuit, CEH
28 provided a 60-Day “Notice of Violation of Proposition 65” to the California Attorney General,

1 the District Attorneys of every county in California, the City Attorneys of every California city
2 with a population greater than 750,000 and to each of the named Defendants. In compliance with
3 Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 27 C.C.R. § 25903(b), each Notice included the
4 following information: (1) the name and address of each violator; (2) the statute violated; (3) the
5 time period during which violations occurred; (4) specific descriptions of the violations,
6 including (a) the routes of exposure to Lead from the Products, and (b) the specific type of
7 Products sold and used in violation of Proposition 65; and (5) the name of the specific
8 Proposition 65-listed chemical that is the subject of the violations described in each Notice.

9 28. CEH also sent a Certificate of Merit for each Notice to the California
10 Attorney General, the District Attorneys of every county in California, the City Attorneys of
11 every California city with a population greater than 750,000 and to each of the named
12 Defendants. In compliance with Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3101, each
13 Certificate certified that CEH's counsel: (1) has consulted with one or more persons with
14 relevant and appropriate experience or expertise who reviewed facts, studies or other data
15 regarding the exposures to Lead alleged in each Notice; and (2) based on the information
16 obtained through such consultations, believes that there is a reasonable and meritorious case for a
17 citizen enforcement action based on the facts alleged in each Notice. In compliance with Health
18 & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3102, each Certificate served on the Attorney
19 General included factual information – provided on a confidential basis – sufficient to establish
20 the basis for the Certificate, including the identity of the person(s) consulted by CEH's counsel
21 and the facts, studies or other data reviewed by such persons.

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

26 30. Defendants both know and intend that individuals, including pregnant
27 women and children, will use, touch or handle the Products, thus exposing them to Lead.

28 31. Under Proposition 65, an exposure is "knowing" where the party

1 responsible for such exposure has:

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

5 27 C.C.R. § 25102(n). This knowledge may be either actual or constructive. *See, e.g.,* Final
6 Statement of Reasons Revised (November 4, 1988) (pursuant to former 22 C.C.R. Division 2,
7 § 12201).

8 32. Defendants have been informed of the Lead in their Products by the 60-
9 Day Notice of Violation and accompanying Certificate of Merit served on them by CEH.

10 33. Defendants also have constructive knowledge that their Products contain
11 Lead due to the widespread media coverage concerning the problem of Lead in consumer
12 products in general and in products made of vinyl in particular.

13 34. As companies that manufacture, import, distribute and/or sell the Products
14 for use in the California marketplace, Defendants know or should know that the Products contain
15 Lead and that individuals who use the Products will be exposed to Lead. The Lead exposures to
16 consumers who use the Products are a natural and foreseeable consequence of Defendants'
17 placing the Products into the stream of commerce.

18 35. Nevertheless, Defendants continue to expose consumers, including
19 pregnant women and children, to Lead without prior clear and reasonable warnings regarding the
20 carcinogenic or reproductive hazards of Lead.

21 36. CEH has engaged in good-faith efforts to resolve the claims alleged herein
22 prior to filing this Complaint.

23 37. Any person "violating or threatening to violate" Proposition 65 may be
24 enjoined in any court of competent jurisdiction. Health & Safety Code § 25249.7. "Threaten to
25 violate" is defined to mean "to create a condition in which there is a substantial probability that a
26 violation will occur." Health & Safety Code § 25249.11(e). Proposition 65 provides for civil
27 penalties not to exceed \$2,500 per day for each violation of Proposition 65.
28

1 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

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

3 38. CEH realleges and incorporates by reference as if specifically set forth
4 herein Paragraphs 1 through 37, inclusive.

5 39. By placing the Products into the stream of commerce, each Defendant is a
6 person in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11.

7 40. Lead is a chemical listed by the State of California as known to cause
8 cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm.

9 41. Defendants know that average use of the Products will expose users of the
10 Products to Lead. Defendants intend that the Products be used in a manner that results in
11 exposures to Lead from the Products.

12 42. Defendants have failed, and continue to fail, to provide clear and
13 reasonable warnings regarding the carcinogenicity and reproductive toxicity of Lead to users of
14 the Products.

15 43. By committing the acts alleged above, Defendants have at all times
16 relevant to this Complaint violated Proposition 65 by knowingly and intentionally exposing
17 individuals to Lead without first giving clear and reasonable warnings to such individuals
18 regarding the carcinogenicity and reproductive toxicity of Lead.

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

20 **PRAAYER FOR RELIEF**

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

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

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

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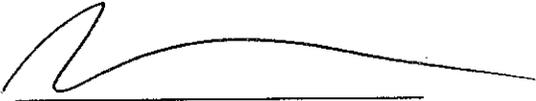
3. That the Court, pursuant to Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(a), order Defendants to take action to stop ongoing unwarned exposures to Lead resulting from use of Products sold by Defendants, as CEH shall specify in further application to the Court;

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

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

Dated: May 20, 2011

Respectfully submitted,
LEXINGTON LAW GROUP



Howard Hirsch
Attorneys for Plaintiff
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH