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CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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KIM TURNER
Court Executive Officer
MARIN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
By: J. Chen, Deputy

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

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CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH,)
a non-profit corporation,)
Plaintiff,)
v.)
BURNES HOME ACCENTS, LLC; KOHL'S)
DEPARTMENT STORES, INC.; and DOES 1)
through 200, inclusive,)
Defendants.)

Case No. 1104722

**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' photo albums (the "Products").
10 Consumers, including pregnant women, are exposed to Lead when they use, touch or handle the
11 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, to
18 Lead.

19 3. Despite the fact that Defendants expose pregnant women and other
20 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 Products in California and/or by having such other contacts with California so as to render the
2 exercise of jurisdiction over it by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair
3 play and substantial justice.

4 12. Venue is proper in the Marin County Superior Court because one or more of
5 the violations arise in the County of Marin.

6 **BACKGROUND FACTS**

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

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

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

19 15. On February 27, 1987, the State of California officially listed lead as a
20 chemical known to cause reproductive toxicity. Lead is specifically identified as a reproductive
21 toxicant under three subcategories: “developmental reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to
22 the developing fetus, “female reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the female
23 reproductive system, and “male reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the male
24 reproductive system. 27 California Code of Regulations (“C.C.R.”) § 27001(c). On February 27,
25 1988, one year after it was listed as a chemical known to cause reproductive toxicity, lead
26 became subject to the clear and reasonable warning requirement regarding reproductive toxicants
27 under Proposition 65. *Ibid.*; Health & Safety Code § 25249.10(b).

28 16. On October 1, 1992, the State of California officially listed lead and lead
compounds as chemicals known to cause cancer. On October 1, 1993, one year after they were

1 listed as chemicals known to cause cancer, lead and lead compounds became subject to the clear
2 and reasonable warning requirement regarding carcinogens under Proposition 65. 27 C.C.R.
3 § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code § 25249.10(b).

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

14 18. There is no safe level of exposure to Lead and even minute amounts of
15 Lead exposure have been proven harmful to children and adults. Studies have repeatedly
16 concluded that concentrations of Lead in children's blood previously deemed acceptable can
17 have adverse health effects. *See, e.g.,* Canfield, R.L., *et al.*, "Intellectual Impairment in Children
18 with Blood Lead Concentrations below 10 ug per Deciliter," *New England Journal of Medicine*
19 348:16, 2003. Another study on the effect of childhood Lead exposure declared that even the
20 smallest detectable amount of blood Lead levels in children can mean the difference between an
21 A or B grade in school. Lanphear, B.P., Dietrich, K., Auinger, P., Cox, C., "Subclinical Lead
22 Toxicity in U.S. Children and Adolescents," *Neurodevelopmental Disabilities II Platform*, 2000.

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

1 20. Defendants' Products contain sufficient quantities of Lead such that
2 consumers, including pregnant women, who touch or handle the Products are exposed to Lead
3 through the average use of the Products. The routes of exposure for the violations are direct
4 ingestion when consumers place the Products in their mouths; ingestion via hand-to-mouth
5 contact after consumers touch or handle the Products; and dermal absorption directly through the
6 skin when consumers touch or handle the Products. These exposures occur in homes,
7 workplaces and everywhere else throughout California where these Products are handled or used.

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

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

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

24 24. CEH also sent a Certificate of Merit for each Notice to the California
25 Attorney General, the District Attorneys of every county in California, the City Attorneys of
26 every California city with a population greater than 750,000 and to each of the named
27 Defendants. In compliance with Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3101, each
28 Certificate certified that CEH's counsel: (1) has consulted with one or more persons with

1 relevant and appropriate experience or expertise who reviewed facts, studies or other data
2 regarding the exposures to Lead alleged in each Notice; and (2) based on the information
3 obtained through such consultations, believes that there is a reasonable and meritorious case for a
4 citizen enforcement action based on the facts alleged in each Notice. In compliance with Health
5 & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3102, each Certificate served on the Attorney
6 General included factual information – provided on a confidential basis – sufficient to establish
7 the basis for the Certificate, including the identity of the person(s) consulted by CEH’s counsel
8 and the facts, studies or other data reviewed by such persons.

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

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

15 27. Under Proposition 65, an exposure is “knowing” where the party
16 responsible for such exposure has:

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

20 27 C.C.R. § 25102(n). This knowledge may be either actual or constructive. *See, e.g.*, Final
21 Statement of Reasons Revised (November 4, 1988) (pursuant to former 22 C.C.R. Division 2,
22 § 12201).

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

25 29. Defendants also have constructive knowledge that their Products contain
26 Lead due to the widespread media coverage concerning the problem of Lead in consumer
27 products in general and in products made of vinyl in particular.

28 30. As companies that manufacture, import, distribute and/or sell the Products

1 for use in the California marketplace, Defendants know or should know that the Products contain
2 Lead and that individuals who use the Products will be exposed to Lead. The Lead exposures to
3 consumers who use the Products are a natural and foreseeable consequence of Defendants'
4 placing the Products into the stream of commerce.

5 31. Nevertheless, Defendants continue to expose consumers, including
6 pregnant women, to Lead without prior clear and reasonable warnings regarding the carcinogenic
7 or reproductive hazards of Lead.

8 32. CEH has engaged in good-faith efforts to resolve the claims alleged herein
9 prior to filing this Complaint.

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

15 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

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

17 34. CEH realleges and incorporates by reference as if specifically set forth
18 herein Paragraphs 1 through 33, inclusive.

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

21 36. Lead is a chemical listed by the State of California as known to cause
22 cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm.

23 37. Defendants know that average use of the Products will expose users of the
24 Products to Lead. Defendants intend that the Products be used in a manner that results in
25 exposures to Lead from the Products.

26 38. Defendants have failed, and continue to fail, to provide clear and
27 reasonable warnings regarding the carcinogenicity and reproductive toxicity of Lead to users of
28 the Products.

