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CLERK OF THE COURT VICTORIA GONZALEZ Deputy Clerk

Attorney for Plaintiff Environmental Research Center, Inc.

# SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

#### COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH CENTER. INC..

Case No.

CGC-14-541224

COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF AND CIVIL PENALTIES

[Health & Safety Code §25249.5, et seq.]

Plaintiff,

NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.: BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.;

14 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH: LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY;

VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN

SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN

SHOPPE, INC.; and DOES 1-50, inclusive,

Defendants.

Plaintiff Environmental Research Center, Inc. brings this action in the interests of the general public and, on information and belief, hereby alleges:

# INTRODUCTION

- 1. This action seeks to remedy Defendants' continuing failure to warn consumers in California that they are being exposed to lead, a substance known to the State of California<sup>1</sup> to cause cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm.
- Defendants have manufactured, packaged, distributed, marketed, sold and/or have 2. otherwise been involved in the chain of commerce of, and continue to manufacture, package,

(1)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> All statutory and regulatory references herein are to California law, unless otherwise specified.

distribute, market, sell, and/or otherwise continue to be involved in the chain of commerce of one or more of the ingestible products identified in Exhibit A attached hereto (hereinafter referred to as "THE PRODUCTS"), which contain the chemical lead and which have been and continue to be offered for sale, sold and/or otherwise provided for use and/or handling to individuals in California.

- 3. The use and/or handling of each of THE PRODUCTS causes exposures to lead at levels requiring a "clear and reasonable warning" under California's Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, Health & Safety Code ("H&S Code") §25249.5, et. seq. (also known as "Proposition 65"). Defendants have failed to provide the health hazard warnings required by Proposition 65.
- 4. Defendants' continued manufacturing, packaging, distributing, marketing and/or sales of THE PRODUCTS without the required health hazard warnings, causes individuals to be involuntarily and unwittingly exposed to levels of lead that violate Proposition 65.
- 5. Plaintiff seeks injunctive relief enjoining Defendants from the continued manufacturing, packaging, distributing, marketing and/or selling of THE PRODUCTS for sale or use in California without first providing clear and reasonable warnings, within the meaning of Proposition 65, regarding the risks of cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm posed by exposure to lead through the use and/or handling of THE PRODUCTS. Plaintiff seeks an injunctive order compelling Defendants to bring their business practices into compliance with Proposition 65 by providing clear and reasonable warnings to each individual who may be exposed to lead from the use and/or handling of THE PRODUCTS.
- 6. In addition to injunctive relief, Plaintiff seeks an assessment of civil penalties to remedy Defendants' failure to provide clear and reasonable warnings regarding exposures to the lead.

#### JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 7. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to California Constitution
  Article VI, Section 10, which grants the Superior Court "original jurisdiction in all causes except
  those given by statute to other trial courts." The statute under which this action is brought does
  not specify any other basis for jurisdiction.
  - 8. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because, based on information and

belief, Defendants are businesses having sufficient minimum contacts with California, or otherwise intentionally availing themselves of the California market through the marketing, distribution and/or sale of THE PRODUCTS in the State of California to render the exercise of jurisdiction over them by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

9. This Court is the proper venue for this action because the Defendants have violated California law in the County of San Francisco. Furthermore, this Court is the proper venue under Code of Civil Procedure §395.5 and H&S Code §25249.7(a), which provides that any person who violates or threatens to violate H&S Code §\$25249.5 or 25249.6 may be enjoined in any court of competent jurisdiction.

# **PARTIES**

- 10. Plaintiff ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH CENTER, INC. ("ERC") is a non-profit corporation organized under California's Non-Profit Benefit Corporation Law. ERC is dedicated to, among other causes, reducing the use and misuse of hazardous and toxic substances, consumer protection, worker safety and corporate responsibility.
- 11. ERC is a "Person" within the meaning of H&S Code \$25118 and H&S Code \$25249.11(a), and brings this enforcement action "in the public interest" pursuant to H&S Code \$25249.7(d).
- 12. Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC. are corporations, and each is a "Person" within the meaning of H&S Code §25249.11(a). Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC. have manufactured, packaged, distributed, marketed, sold and/or has otherwise been involved in the chain of commerce of, and continue to manufacture, package, distribute, market, sell, and/or otherwise continues to be involved in the chain of commerce of one or more of THE PRODUCTS for sale or use in California. Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC.,

at all times relevant to this action, have had 10 or more employees and is a "Person in the course of doing business" pursuant to H&S Code §25249.11(b).

13. Defendants DOES 1-50 are named herein under fictitious names, as their true names and capacities are unknown to Plaintiff. ERC is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that each of said Does has manufactured, packaged, distributed, marketed, sold and/or has otherwise been involved in the chain of commerce of, and continues to manufacture, package, distribute, market, sell, and/or otherwise continues to be involved in the chain of commerce of THE PRODUCTS for sale or use in California, and/or is responsible, in some actionable manner, for the events and happenings referred to herein, either through its conduct or through the conduct of its agents, servants or employees, or in some other manner, causing the harms alleged herein. Plaintiff will seek leave to amend this Complaint to set forth the true names and capacities of Does when ascertained.

# STATUTORY BACKGROUND

- 14. The People of the State of California have declared in Proposition 65 their right "[t]o be informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm." (Section 1(b) of Initiative Measure, Proposition 65).
- 15. To effect this goal, Proposition 65 requires that individuals be provided with a "clear and reasonable warning" before being exposed to substances listed by the State of California as causing cancer or reproductive toxicity. H&S Code §25249.6 states, in pertinent part:

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

16. Proposition 65 provides that any person who "violates or threatens to violate" the statute "may be enjoined in any court of competent jurisdiction." (H&S Code §25249.7(a).) "Threaten to violate" is defined to mean creating "a condition in which there is a substantial probability that a violation will occur." (H&S Code §25249.11(e).) Violators are liable for civil penalties of up to \$2,500 per day for each violation of Proposition 65. (H&S Code §25249.7(b).)

# FACTUAL BACKGROUND

17. On February 27, 1987, the State of California officially listed the chemical lead as

a chemical known to cause developmental and reproductive toxicity. Lead became subject to the warning requirement one year later and was therefore subject to the "clear and reasonable" warning requirements of Proposition 65 beginning on February 27, 1988. (27 California Code of Regulations ("CCR") §25000, et seq.; H&S Code §25249.5, et seq.)

- 18. On October 1, 1992, the State of California officially listed the chemical lead as a chemical known to cause cancer. Lead became subject to the warning requirement one year later and was therefore subject to the "clear and reasonable" warning requirements of Proposition 65 beginning on October 1, 1993. (27 CCR §25000, et seq.; H&S Code §25249.5, et seq.)
- 19. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and based on such information and belief, alleges THE PRODUCTS have been marketed, distributed and/or sold to individuals in California without the requisite clear and reasonable warnings before, on, and after May 9, 2009. THE PRODUCTS continue to be marketed, distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.
- 20. As a proximate result of acts by Defendants, as persons in the course of doing business within the meaning of H&S Code §25249.11(b), individuals throughout the State of California, including in the County of San Francisco, have been exposed to lead without clear and reasonable warnings. The individuals subject to exposures to lead include normal and foreseeable users of THE PRODUCTS, as well as all other persons exposed to THE PRODUCTS.
- 21. At all times relevant to this action, Defendants have knowingly and intentionally exposed the users and/or handlers of THE PRODUCTS to lead without first giving clear and reasonable warnings to such individuals.
- 22. Individuals using or handling THE PRODUCTS are exposed to lead in excess of the "maximum allowable daily" and "no significant risk" levels determined by the State of California, as applicable.
- 23. At all times relevant to this action, Defendants have, in the course of doing business, failed to provide individuals using and/or handling THE PRODUCTS with clear and reasonable warnings that THE PRODUCTS exposes individuals to lead.
- 24. THE PRODUCTS continue to be marketed, distributed, and/or sold in California without the requisite clear and reasonable warnings.

a.

# **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

(Injunctive Relief for Violations of Health and Safety Code §25249.5, et seq. concerning THE PRODUCTS, which are identified in Plaintiff's February 14, 2014 and May 23, 2014 60-Day Notices of Violations)

- 25. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference Paragraphs 1 through 24, inclusive, as if specifically set forth herein.
- 26. On February 14, 2014, Plaintiff sent a 60-Day Notice of Proposition 65 violations to the requisite public enforcement agencies and to Defendant NATURE'S ANSWER, INC. ("February 14, 2014 Notice of Violations"). On May 23, 2014, Plaintiff sent separate 60-Day Notices of Proposition 65 violations to the requisite public enforcement agencies and to Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC. ("May 23, 2014 Notices of Violations"). THE PRODUCTS were identified in the Notices of Violations as containing lead exceeding allowable levels. The Notices of Violations were issued pursuant to, and in compliance with, the requirements of H&S Code §25249.7(d) and the statute's implementing regulations regarding the notice of violations to be given to certain public enforcement agencies and to the violator. The Notices of Violations were issued as follows:
  - The February 14, 2014 Notice of Violations was provided by Certified Mail, along with a Certificate of Merit by the attorney for the noticing party stating that there is a reasonable and meritorious cause for this action, to Defendant NATURE'S ANSWER, INC. and the California Attorney General; and the separate May 23, 2014 Notices of Violations were provided by Certified Mail, along with a Certificate of Merit by the attorney for the noticing party stating that there is a reasonable and meritorious cause for this action, to Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC., respectively, and to the California Attorney General. The requisite county district attorneys and city attorneys were provided copies by First

Class Mail of the Notices of Violations and Certificates of Merit.

- b. Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC. were provided, with each of the respective Notices of Violations, a copy of a document entitled "The Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986 (Proposition 65): A Summary," which is also known as Appendix A to Title 27 of CCR §25903.
- c. The California Attorney General was provided, with the Notices of Violations, additional factual information sufficient to establish a basis for the certificates, including the identity of the persons consulted with and relied on by the certifier, and the facts, studies, or other data reviewed by those persons, pursuant to H&S Code §§25249.7(d)(1) and 25249.7(h)(2).
- 27. The appropriate public enforcement agencies have failed to commence and diligently prosecute a cause of action under H&S Code §25249.5, et seq. against Defendants based on the allegations herein.
- 28. By committing the acts alleged in this Complaint, Defendants at all times relevant to this action, and continuing through the present, have violated and continue to violate H&S Code §25249.6 by, in the course of doing business, knowingly and intentionally exposing individuals who use or handle THE PRODUCTS to the chemical lead at levels exceeding allowable exposure levels without Defendants first giving clear and reasonable warnings to such individuals pursuant to H&S Code §§25249.6 and 25249.11(f). Each of the Defendants has manufactured, packaged, distributed, marketed, sold and/or has otherwise been involved in the chain of commerce of, and continues to manufacture, package, distribute, market, sell, and/or otherwise continues to be involved in the chain of commerce of one or more of THE PRODUCTS, which have been, are, and will be used and/or handled by individuals in California, without Defendants providing clear and reasonable warnings, within the meaning of Proposition 65, regarding the risks of cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm posed by exposure to lead through the use and/or handling of THE PRODUCTS. Furthermore, Defendants have

threatened to violate H&S Code §25249.6 by THE PRODUCTS being marketed, offered for sale, sold and/or otherwise provided for use and/or handling to individuals in California.

- 29. By the above-described acts, Defendants have violated H&S Code §25249.6 and are therefore subject to an injunction ordering Defendants to stop violating Proposition 65, and to provide required warnings to consumers and other individuals who will purchase, use and/or handle THE PRODUCTS.
- 30. An action for injunctive relief under Proposition 65 is specifically authorized by Health & Safety Code §25249.7(a).
- 31. Continuing commission by Defendants of the acts alleged above will irreparably harm the citizens of the State of California, for which harm they have no plain, speedy, or adequate remedy at law.

Wherefore, plaintiff prays judgment against Defendants, as set forth hereafter.

# **SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION**

(Civil Penalties for Violations of Health and Safety Code §25249.5, et seq. concerning THE PRODUCTS, which are identified in Plaintiff's February 14, 2014 and May 23, 2014 60-Day Notices of Violations)

- 32. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference Paragraphs 1 through 31, inclusive, as if specifically set forth herein.
- 33. On February 14, 2014, Plaintiff sent a 60-Day Notice of Proposition 65 violations to the requisite public enforcement agencies and to Defendant NATURE'S ANSWER, INC. ("February 14, 2014 Notice of Violations"). On May 23, 2014, Plaintiff sent separate 60-Day Notices of Proposition 65 violations to the requisite public enforcement agencies and to Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC. ("May 23, 2014 Notices of Violations"). THE PRODUCTS were identified in the Notices of Violations as containing lead exceeding allowable levels. The Notices of Violations were issued pursuant to, and in compliance with, the requirements of H&S Code §25249.7(d) and the statute's implementing regulations regarding the notice of violations to be given to certain public enforcement agencies and to the violator. The Notices of Violations were issued as follows:
  - a. The February 14, 2014 Notice of Violations was provided by Certified

Mail, along with a Certificate of Merit by the attorney for the noticing party stating that there is a reasonable and meritorious cause for this action, to Defendant NATURE'S ANSWER, INC. and the California Attorney General; and the separate May 23, 2014 Notices of Violations were provided by Certified Mail, along with a Certificate of Merit by the attorney for the noticing party stating that there is a reasonable and meritorious cause for this action, to Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC., respectively, and to the California Attorney General. The requisite county district attorneys and city attorneys were provided copies by First Class Mail of the Notices of Violations and Certificates of Merit.

- b. Defendants NATURE'S ANSWER, INC.; BIO-BOTANICA, INC.; D-D CHEMCO., INC.; 6S, INC. dba ALL STAR HEALTH; LUCKY VITAMIN COMPANY; VITACOST.COM, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE INDUSTRIES, INC.; VITAMIN SHOPPE, INC. were provided, with each of the respective Notices of Violations, a copy of a document entitled "The Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986 (Proposition 65): A Summary," which is also known as Appendix A to Title 27 of CCR §25903.
- c. The California Attorney General was provided, with the Notices of Violations, additional factual information sufficient to establish a basis for the certificates, including the identity of the persons consulted with and relied on by the certifier, and the facts, studies, or other data reviewed by those persons, pursuant to H&S Code §§25249.7(d)(1) and 25249.7(h)(2).
- 34. The appropriate public enforcement agencies have failed to commence and diligently prosecute a cause of action under H&S Code §25249.5, et seq. against Defendants based on the allegations herein.
  - 35. By committing the acts alleged in this Complaint, Defendants at all times relevant

to this action, and continuing through the present, have violated and continue to violate H&S Code §25249.6 by, in the course of doing business, knowingly and intentionally exposing individuals who use or handle THE PRODUCTS to the chemical lead at levels exceeding allowable exposure levels without Defendants first giving clear and reasonable warnings to such individuals pursuant to H&S Code §\$25249.6 and 25249.11(f). Each of the Defendants has manufactured, packaged, distributed, marketed, sold and/or has otherwise been involved in the chain of commerce of, and continues to manufacture, package, distribute, market, sell, and/or otherwise continues to be involved in the chain of commerce of one or more of THE PRODUCTS, which have been, are, and will be used and/or handled by individuals in California, without Defendants providing clear and reasonable warnings, within the meaning of Proposition 65, regarding the risks of cancer, birth defects and other reproductive harm posed by exposure to lead through the use and/or handling of THE PRODUCTS. Furthermore, Defendants have threatened to violate H&S Code §25249.6 by THE PRODUCTS being marketed, offered for sale, sold and/or otherwise provided for use and/or handling to individuals in California.

36. By the above-described acts, Defendants are liable, pursuant to H&S Code §25249.7(b), for a civil penalty of \$2,500 per day for each violation of H&S Code §25249.6 relating to THE PRODUCTS.

Wherefore, plaintiff prays judgment against Defendants, as set forth hereafter.

#### THE NEED FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

- 37. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by this reference Paragraphs 1 through 36, as if set forth below.
- 38. By committing the acts alleged in this Complaint, Defendants have caused irreparable harm for which there is no plain, speedy or adequate remedy at law. In the absence of equitable relief, Defendants will continue to create a substantial risk of irreparable injury by continuing to cause consumers to be involuntarily and unwittingly exposed to lead through the use and/or handling of THE PRODUCTS.

# **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

Wherefore, Plaintiff prays for the following relief:

A. A preliminary and permanent injunction enjoining Defendants, their agents,