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Clifford A. Chanler, State Bar No. 135534
Warren M. Klein, State Bar No. 303958
THE CHANLER GROUP
2560 Ninth Street
Parker Plaza, Suite 214
Berkeley, CA 94710-2565
Telephone: (510) 848-8880
Facsimile: (510) 848-8118
E-mail cliff@chanler.com
E-mail warren@chanler.com

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Attorneys for Plaintiff
LAURENCE VINOUCUR

PER LOCAL RULE 5 THIS
CASE IS ASSIGNED TO
DEPT 9

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF CONTRA COSTA
UNLIMITED CIVIL JURISDICTION

LAURENCE VINOUCUR,

Plaintiff,

v.

ABSOLUTE USA, INC.; and DOES 1-150,
inclusive,

Defendants.

C16 - 02271
Case No. _____
**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES
AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**
(Health & Safety Code § 25249.5 et seq.)

1 **NATURE OF THE ACTION**

2 1. This Complaint is a representative action brought by plaintiff Laurence Vinocur
3 in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People’s right to be
4 informed of the health hazards caused by exposures to di(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate (DEHP), a toxic
5 chemical found in vinyl/PVC electric tape sold by defendants in California.

6 2. By this Complaint, Plaintiff seeks to remedy Defendants’ continuing failure to
7 warn individuals not covered by California’s Occupational Safety Health Act, Labor Code
8 section 6300 et seq., who purchase, use or handle Defendants’ products, about the risks of
9 exposure to DEHP present in and on vinyl/PVC electric tape manufactured, distributed, and
10 offered for sale or use throughout the State of California. Individuals not covered by
11 California’s Occupational Safety Health Act, Labor Code section 6300 et seq. who purchase,
12 use or handle defendants’ products are referred to hereinafter as “consumers”.

13 3. Detectable levels of DEHP are found in and on the vinyl/PVC electrical tape that
14 defendants manufacture, distribute, and offer for sale without a warning to consumers
15 throughout the State of California.

16 4. Under the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified at
17 Health and Safety Code section 25249.6 et seq. (“Proposition 65”), “[n]o person in the course of
18 doing business shall knowingly and intentionally expose any individual to a chemical known to
19 the state to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity without first giving clear and reasonable
20 warning to such individual” Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

21 5. On October 24, 2003, California listed DEHP pursuant to Proposition 65 as a
22 chemical that is known to cause birth defects and other reproductive harm. DEHP became
23 subject to the “clear and reasonable warning” requirements of the act one year later on October
24 24, 2004. Cal. Code Regs. tit. 27, § 27001(b); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 &
25 25249.10(b).

26 6. Defendants manufacture, distribute, import, sell, and offer for sale without health
27 hazard warnings in California, vinyl/PVC electrical tape containing DEHP including, but not
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1 limited to *Absolute USA Electrical Tape, BT1700, UPC #8 47169 01661 5*. All vinyl/PVC
2 electrical tape containing DEHP are referred to collectively hereinafter as “PRODUCTS.”

3 7. Defendants’ failure to warn consumers in the State of California of the health
4 hazards associated with exposures to DEHP in conjunction with defendants’ sales of the
5 PRODUCTS are violations of Proposition 65, and subject defendants, and each of them, to
6 enjoinder of such conduct as well as civil penalties for each violation. Health & Safety Code
7 § 25249.7(a) & (b)(1).

8 8. For Defendants’ violations of Proposition 65, plaintiff seeks preliminary and
9 permanent injunctive relief to compel defendants to provide consumers of the PRODUCTS with
10 the required warning regarding the health hazards associated with exposures to DEHP. Health
11 & Safety Code § 25249.7(a).

12 9. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(b), plaintiff also seeks civil
13 penalties against defendants for their violations of Proposition 65.

14 **PARTIES**

15 10. Plaintiff LAURENCE VINO CUR is a citizen of the State of California who is
16 dedicated to protecting the health of California citizens through the elimination or reduction of
17 toxic exposures from consumer products; and she brings this action in the public interest
18 pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(d).

19 11. Defendant ABSOLUTE USA, INC. (“ABSOLUTE”) is a person in the course of
20 doing business within the meaning of Health and Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

21 12. ABSOLUTE manufactures, imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the
22 PRODUCTS for sale or use in the State of California, or implies by its conduct that it
23 manufactures, imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the PRODUCTS for sale or use in the
24 State of California.

25 13. Defendants DOES 1-50 (“MANUFACTURER DEFENDANTS”) are each a
26 person in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health and Safety Code sections
27 25249.6 and 25249.11.

1 14. MANUFACTURER DEFENDANTS research, test, design, assemble, fabricate,
2 and manufacture, or imply by their conduct that they research, test, design, assemble, fabricate,
3 and manufacture one or more of the PRODUCTS offered for sale or use in the State of
4 California.

5 15. Defendants DOES 51-100 ("DISTRIBUTOR DEFENDANTS") are each persons
6 in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health and Safety Code sections 25249.6
7 and 25249.11.

8 16. DISTRIBUTOR DEFENDANTS distribute, exchange, transfer, process, and
9 transport one or more of the PRODUCTS to individuals, businesses, or retailers for sale or use
10 in the State of California.

11 17. Defendants DOES 101-150 ("RETAILER DEFENDANTS") are each a person in
12 the course of doing business within the meaning of Health and Safety Code sections 25249.6
13 and 25249.11.

14 18. RETAILER DEFENDANTS offer the PRODUCTS for sale to individuals in the
15 State of California.

16 19. At this time, the true names of defendants DOES 1 through 150, inclusive, are
17 unknown to plaintiff, who, therefore, sues said defendants by their fictitious names pursuant to
18 Code of Civil Procedure section 474. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and on that basis
19 alleges, that each of the fictitiously named defendants is responsible for the acts and occurrences
20 alleged herein. When ascertained, their true names shall be reflected in an amended complaint.

21 20. ABSOLUTE, MANUFACTURER DEFENDANTS, DISTRIBUTOR
22 DEFENDANTS, and RETAILER DEFENDANTS shall, where appropriate, collectively be
23 referred to as "DEFENDANTS."

24 VENUE AND JURISDICTION

25 21. Venue is proper in Contra Costa County Superior Court, pursuant to Code of Civil
26 Procedure sections 393, 395, and 395.5, because this Court is a court of competent jurisdiction,
27 because plaintiff seeks civil penalties against DEFENDANTS, because one or more instances of
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1 wrongful conduct occurred, and continue to occur, in this county, and/or because
2 DEFENDANTS conducted, and continue to conduct, business in Contra Costa County with
3 respect to the PRODUCTS.¹

4 22. The California Superior Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to
5 California Constitution Article VI, section 10, which grants the Superior Court “original
6 jurisdiction in all causes except those given by statute to other trial courts.” The statute under
7 which this action is brought does not specify any other basis of subject matter jurisdiction.

8 23. The California Superior Court has jurisdiction over DEFENDANTS based on
9 plaintiff’s information and good faith belief that each defendant is a person, firm, corporation or
10 association that is a citizen of the State of California, has sufficient minimum contacts in the
11 State of California, and/or otherwise purposefully avails itself of the California market.
12 DEFENDANTS’ purposeful availment renders the exercise of personal jurisdiction by
13 California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

14 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

15 **(Violation of Proposition 65 - Against All Defendants)**

16 24. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference, as if fully set forth herein,
17 Paragraphs 1 through 23, inclusive.

18 25. In enacting Proposition 65, in the preamble to the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic
19 Enforcement Act of 1986, the People of California expressly declared their right “[t]o be
20 informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive
21 harm.”

22 26. Proposition 65 states, “[n]o person in the course of doing business shall
23 knowingly and intentionally expose any individual to a chemical known to the state to cause
24 cancer or reproductive toxicity without first giving clear and reasonable warning to such
25 individual” Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

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28 ¹ Plaintiff purchased vinyl/PVC electrical tape products at Fry’s Electronics retail store in Contra Costa County with
15% DEHP content.

1 27. On April 27, 2016, plaintiff served a sixty-day notice of violation, together with
2 the requisite certificate of merit, on ABSOLUTE and certain public enforcement agencies
3 alleging that, as a result of DEFENDANTS' sales of the PRODUCTS containing DEHP,
4 consumers in the State of California were being exposed to DEHP resulting from their
5 reasonably foreseeable use of the PRODUCTS, without the consumers first having been
6 provided with a "clear and reasonable warning" regarding the harms associated with such
7 exposures, as required by Proposition 65.

8 28. DEFENDANTS manufacture, import, distribute, sell, and offer the PRODUCTS
9 for sale or use in violation of Health and Safety Code section 25249.6, and DEFENDANTS'
10 violations have continued beyond their receipt of Plaintiff's sixty-day notice of violation.
11 DEFENDANTS' violations are ongoing and continuous in nature and, as such, will continue in
12 the future.

13 29. After receiving plaintiff's sixty-day notice of violation, no public enforcement
14 agency has commenced and diligently prosecuted a cause of action against DEFENDANTS
15 under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations that are the subject of plaintiff's notice of
16 violation.

17 30. The PRODUCTS that DEFENDANTS manufacture, import, distribute, sell, and
18 offer for sale or use in California cause exposures to DEHP as a result of the reasonably
19 foreseeable use of the PRODUCTS. Such exposures caused by DEFENDANTS and endured by
20 consumers in California are not exempt from the "clear and reasonable" warning requirements
21 of Proposition 65, yet DEFENDANTS provide no warning.

22 31. DEFENDANTS knew or should have known that the PRODUCTS they
23 manufacture, import, distribute, sell, and offer for sale or use in California contain DEHP.

24 32. DEHP is present in or on the PRODUCTS in such a way as to expose consumers
25 to DEHP through dermal contact and/or ingestion during reasonably foreseeable use.
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33. The normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the PRODUCTS has caused, and continues to cause, consumer exposures to DEHP, as defined by title 27 of the California Code of Regulations, section 25602(b).

34. DEFENDANTS know that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the PRODUCTS exposes consumers to DEHP through dermal contact and/or ingestion.

35. DEFENDANTS intend that exposures to DEHP from the reasonably foreseeable use of the PRODUCTS will occur by their deliberate, non-accidental participation in the manufacture, importation, distribution, sale, and offering of the PRODUCTS for sale or use to consumers in California.

36. DEFENDANTS failed to provide a “clear and reasonable warning” to those consumers in California who were or who would become exposed to DEHP through dermal contact and/or ingestion resulting from their use of the PRODUCTS.

37. Contrary to the express policy and statutory prohibition of Proposition 65 enacted directly by California voters, consumers exposed to DEHP through dermal contact and/or ingestion as a result of their use of the PRODUCTS that DEFENDANTS sell without a “clear and reasonable” health hazard warning, have suffered, and continue to suffer, irreparable harm for which they have no plain, speedy, or adequate remedy at law.

38. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(b), as a consequence of the above-described acts, DEFENDANTS are liable for a maximum civil penalty of \$2,500 per day for each violation.

39. As a consequence of the above-described acts, Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(a) also specifically authorizes the Court to grant injunctive relief against DEFENDANTS.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

Wherefore, plaintiff prays for judgment against DEFENDANTS as follows:

1. That the Court, pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(b), assess

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1 civil penalties against DEFENDANTS, and each of them, in the amount of \$2,500 per day for
2 each violation;

3 2. That the Court, pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(a),
4 preliminarily and permanently enjoin DEFENDANTS from manufacturing, distributing, or
5 offering the PRODUCTS for sale or use in California without first providing a “clear and
6 reasonable warning” in accordance with title 27 of the California Code of Regulations, section
7 25601 *et seq.*, regarding the harms associated with exposures to DEHP;

8 3. That the Court, Pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 25249.7(a), issue
9 preliminary and permanent injunctions mandating that DEFENDANTS recall all PRODUCTS
10 currently in the chain of commerce in California without a “clear and reasonable warning” as
11 defined by California Code of Regulations title 27, section 25601 *et seq.*;


12 4. That the Court grant plaintiff his reasonable attorneys’ fees and costs of suit; and

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

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Dated: November 30, 2016

Respectfully Submitted,
THE CHANLER GROUP

By: 
Warren M. Klein
Attorneys for Plaintiff
LAURENCE VINOUCUR