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ALAMEDA COUNTY

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8 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
9 COUNTY OF ALAMEDA

10 EMA BELL,

11 Plaintiff,

12 vs.

13 COTTON ON USA, INC.,

14 Defendant.

Case No.:

RG19006112

COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND  
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

(Violation of Health & Safety Code §25249.5 et  
seq.)

15 Plaintiff Ema Bell ("Plaintiff"), by and through his attorneys, alleges the following cause  
16 of action in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California.

17 **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

18 1. Plaintiff brings this representative action on behalf of all California citizens to  
19 enforce relevant portions of Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified  
20 at the Health and Safety Code § 25249.5 et seq ("Proposition 65"), which reads, in relevant part,  
21 "[n]o person in the course of doing business shall knowingly and intentionally expose any  
22 individual to a chemical known to the state to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity without first  
23 giving clear and reasonable warning to such individual ...". Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

24 2. This complaint is a representative action brought by Plaintiff in the public interest  
25 of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People's right to be informed of the health  
26 hazards caused by exposure di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), a toxic chemical found in Cotton  
27 On Annie Trainer kids sneakers/shoes sold and/or distributed by defendant Cotton On USA, Inc.  
28 ("Cotton On" or "Defendant") in California.

- 1 -

COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND INJUNCTIVE RELIEF – VIOLATION OF  
HEALTH & SAFETY CODE §25249.5

BY FAX

1           3.       DEHP is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and  
2 reproductive toxicity. On January 1, 1988, the State of California listed DEHP as a chemical  
3 known to the State to cause cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65  
4 regulations since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§  
5 25249.8 & 25249.10(b). On October 24, 2003, the State of California listed DEHP as a chemical  
6 known to cause reproductive toxicity.

7           4.       Proposition 65 requires all businesses with ten (10) or more employees that  
8 operate within California or sell products therein to comply with Proposition 65 regulations.  
9 Included in such regulations is the requirement that businesses must label any product containing  
10 a Proposition 65-listed chemical with a “clear and reasonable” warning before “knowingly and  
11 intentionally” exposing any person to it.

12          5.       Proposition 65 allows for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation  
13 to be imposed upon defendants in a civil action for violations of Proposition 65. Health & Safety  
14 Code § 25249.7(b). Proposition 65 also allows for any court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin  
15 the actions of a defendant which “violate or threaten to violate” the statute. Health & Safety  
16 Code § 25249.7.

17          6.       Plaintiff alleges that Defendant manufactures, distributes and/or offers for sale in  
18 California, without a requisite exposure warning, Cotton On Annie Trainer kids sneakers/shoes  
19 (the “Products”) that expose users to DEHP.

20          7.       Defendant’s failure to warn consumers and other individuals in California of the  
21 health hazards associated with exposure to DEHP in conjunction with the sale and/or distribution  
22 of the Products is a violation of Proposition 65 and subjects Defendant to the enjoinder and  
23 civil penalties described herein.

24          8.       Plaintiff seeks civil penalties against Defendant for its violations of Proposition  
25 65 in accordance with Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b).

26          9.       Plaintiff also seeks injunctive relief, preliminarily and permanently, requiring  
27 Defendant to provide purchasers or users of the Products with required warnings related to the  
28

1 dangers and health hazards associated with exposure to DEHP pursuant to Health and Safety  
2 Code § 25249.7(a).

3 **PARTIES**

4 10. Plaintiff is a citizen of the State of California acting in the interest of the general  
5 public to promote awareness of exposures to toxic chemicals in products sold in California and  
6 to improve human health by reducing hazardous substances contained in such items. She brings  
7 this action in the public interest pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(d).

8 11. Defendant Cotton On, through its business, effectively manufactures, imports,  
9 distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California, or it implies  
10 by its conduct that it manufactures, imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale  
11 or use in the State of California.

12 12. Plaintiff alleges that defendant Cotton On is a “person” in the course of doing  
13 business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

14 **VENUE AND JURISDICTION**

15 13. Venue is proper in the County of Alameda because one or more of the instances  
16 of wrongful conduct occurred, and continue to occur in this county and/or because Defendant  
17 conducts, and continues to conduct, business in the County of Alameda with respect to the  
18 Products.

19 14. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to California Constitution  
20 Article VI, § 10, which grants the Superior Court original jurisdiction in all causes except those  
21 given by statute to other trial courts. Health and Safety Code § 25249.7 allows for the  
22 enforcement of violations of Proposition 65 in any Court of competent jurisdiction; therefore,  
23 this Court has jurisdiction over this lawsuit.

24 15. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendant because Defendant is either a citizen  
25 of the State of California, has sufficient minimum contacts with the State of California, is  
26 registered with the California Secretary of State as foreign corporations authorized to do business  
27 in the State of California, and/or has otherwise purposefully availed itself of the California  
28

1 market. Such purposeful availment has rendered the exercise of jurisdiction by California courts  
2 consistent and permissible with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

3 **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

4 16. On June 29, 2018, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety  
5 Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendant concerning the exposure of California citizens to  
6 DEHP contained in the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendant  
7 and to the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District attorneys  
8 and City Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein the  
9 herein violations allegedly occurred.

10 17. The Notice complied with all procedural requirements of Proposition 65 including  
11 the attachment of a Certificate of Merit affirming that Plaintiff’s counsel had consulted with at  
12 least one person with relevant and appropriate expertise who reviewed relevant data regarding  
13 DEHP exposure, and that counsel believed there was meritorious and reasonable cause for a  
14 private action.

15 18. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff’s best information and belief, none of  
16 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted  
17 a cause of action against Defendant under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which  
18 are the subject of Plaintiff’s notice of violation.

19 19. Plaintiff is commencing this action more than sixty (60) days from the date of the  
20 Notice to Defendant, as required by law.

21 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

22 **(By Plaintiff against Defendant for the Violation of Proposition 65)**

23 20. Plaintiff hereby repeats and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 19 of  
24 this complaint as though fully set forth herein.

25 21. Defendant has, at all times mentioned herein, acted as either a manufacturer,  
26 distributor, and/or retailer of the Product.

27 22. The Products contain DEHP, a hazardous chemical found on the Proposition 65  
28 list of chemicals known to be hazardous to human health.

1           23.     The Product does not comply with the Proposition 65 warning requirements.

2           24.     Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times  
3 herein, and at least since May 28, 2018, continuing until the present, that Defendant has  
4 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Product  
5 to DEHP without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

6           25.     The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,  
7 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Product. Consequently, the primary route of  
8 exposure to these chemicals is through dermal absorption. Users may potentially be exposed to  
9 DEHP by dermal absorption through direct skin contact with the Product during routine use  
10 when the Products are handled with bare hands. If the exterior of the Product becomes wet due  
11 to contact with water and is handled, aqueous DEHP skin permeation rates have been reported to  
12 be faster than neat DEHP permeation. DEHP from the Product can contaminate the inner lining  
13 of the shoes and the contaminated liner will be a source of DEHP dermal exposure when the  
14 Products are worn with bare feet. If the Products are stored or transported in a carrier, DEHP  
15 that leaches from the Product may contaminate other articles contained within these closed  
16 spaces that are subsequently handled, worn, mouthed, or ingested by the user. Finally, while  
17 mouthing of the Product does not seem likely, some amount of exposure through ingestion can  
18 occur by touching the product with subsequent touching of the user's hand to mouth.

19           26.     Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that such exposures will  
20 continue every day until clear and reasonable warnings are provided to Product purchasers and  
21 users or until this known toxic chemical is removed from the Product.

22           27.     Defendant has knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the  
23 Product exposes individuals to DEHP, and Defendant intends that exposures to DEHP will occur  
24 by its deliberate, non-accidental participation in the manufacture, importation, distribution, sale  
25 and offering of the Products to consumers in California

26           28.     Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this  
27 Complaint.

28

1 29. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b), as a consequence of the above  
 2 described acts, Defendant is liable for a maximum civil penalty of \$2,500 per day per violation.

3 30. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(a), this Court is specifically  
 4 authorized to grant injunctive relief in favor of Plaintiff and against Defendant.

5 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

6 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant and requests the  
 7 following relief:

- 8 A. That the court assess civil penalties against Defendant in the amount of  
 9 \$2,500 per day for each violation in accordance with Health and Safety  
 10 Code § 25249.7(b);
- 11 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendant mandating  
 12 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Product;
- 13 C. That the court grant Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs of suit.
- 14 D. That the court grant any further relief as may be just and proper.

15  
 16 Dated: February 7, 2019

BRODSKY & SMITH, LLC

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