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ENDORSED
FILED
ALAMEDA COUNTY

MAR 11 2020

CLERK OF THE SUPERIOR COURT
By ALICIA ESPINOZA
Deputy

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF ALAMEDA

10 EMA BELL,

11 Plaintiff,

12 vs.

13 THE TJX COMPANIES, INC.,

14 Defendant.

Case No.: **RG20058224**

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

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

15 Plaintiff Ema Bell ("Plaintiff"), by and through her 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 at
20 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 to di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), a toxic chemical found in Vince
27 Camuto bags/totes sold and/or distributed by defendant The TJX Companies, Inc. ("TJX" or the
28 "Defendant") in California.

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

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

12 5. Proposition 65 allows for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation
13 for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00) to be
14 imposed upon defendants in a civil action for violations of Proposition 65. Health & Safety Code
15 § 25249.7(b). Proposition 65 also allows for any court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin the
16 actions of a defendant which “violate or threaten to violate” the statute. Health & Safety Code §
17 25249.7.

18 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendant distributes and/or offers for sale in California,
19 without a requisite exposure warning, Vince Camuto bags/totes (the “Products”) that expose
20 persons to DEHP.

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

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

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

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

10. Plaintiff further seeks a reasonable award of attorney's fees and costs.

PARTIES

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

12. Defendant TJX, through its business, effectively imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California, or it implies by its conduct that it imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California.

13. Plaintiff alleges that defendant TJX is a "person" in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

VENUE AND JURISDICTION

14. Venue is proper in the County of Alameda because one or more of the instances of wrongful conduct occurred, and continue to occur in this county and/or because Defendant conducted, and continues to conduct, business in the County of Alameda with respect to the Products.

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

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

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

STATUTORY BACKGROUND

17. The people of the State of California 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.)

18. 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...

19. An exposure to a chemical in a consumer product is one “which results from a person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other reasonably foreseeable use of a consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a consumer service.” (27 CCR § 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the course of doing business ... shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or transferred unless the product is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

20. Pursuant to H&S Code § 25603.1, the warning may be provided by using one or more of the following methods individually or in combination:¹

- a. A warning that appears on a product’s label or other labeling.
- b. Identification of the product at the retail outlet in a manner which provides a warning. Identification may be through shelf labeling, signs, menus, or a combination thereof.

¹ Alternatively, a person in the course of doing business may elect to comply with the warning requirements set out in the amended version of 27 CCR 25601, *et.seq.* as amended on August 30, 2016, and operative on August 30, 2018.

c. The warnings provided pursuant to subparagraphs (a) and (b) shall be prominently placed upon a product's labels or other labeling or displayed at the retail outlet with such conspicuousness, as compared with other words, statements, designs, or devices in the label, labeling or display as to render it likely to be read and understood by an ordinary individual under customary conditions of purchase or use.

d. A system of signs, public advertising identifying the system and toll-free information services, or any other system that provides clear and reasonable warnings.

21. Proposition 65 provides that any “person who violates or threatens to violate” the statute may be enjoined in a court of competent jurisdiction. (H&S Code § 25249.7.) The phrase “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 \$2,500.00 per day for each violation of the Act (H&S Code § 25249.7) for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00).

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

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

23. The consumer exposures that are the subject of this Complaint result from through dermal absorption. Users can be exposed to DEHP by dermal absorption through direct skin contact with the Product during routine use when contacted with bare hands. If the Product is contacted with wet hands or comes into contact with wet skin, DEHP skin permeation rates from aqueous solutions are faster than neat DEHP permeation. Items placed inside the Product can absorb DEHP that can be subsequently handled, held in direct contact with skin, mouthed, or ingested by the user. DEHP from the Product can absorb to clothes placed inside the Product and these clothes will become a source of DEHP dermal exposure when worn. If the Product is stored

1 or transported in a carrier, DEHP that leaches from the Product may contaminate other articles
2 contained within these closed spaces are subsequently handled, worn, mouthed, or consumed.
3 Finally, while direct mouthing of the Product does not seem likely, some amount of exposure
4 through ingestion can occur by touching of the user's hand to mouth.

5 24. Defendant has manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell
6 and/or sold the Products in California since at least March 11, 2019. The Products continue to be
7 distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.

8 25. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant has knowingly and intentionally
9 exposed users, consumers and/or patients to the Products and the Listed Chemical without first
10 giving a clear and reasonable exposure warning to such individuals.

11 26. As a proximate result of acts by Defendant, as a person in the course of doing
12 business within the meaning of H&S Code § 25249.11, individuals throughout the State of
13 California, including in Alameda County, have been exposed to the Listed Chemical without a
14 clear and reasonable warning on the Products. The individuals subject to the violative exposures
15 include normal and foreseeable users, consumers and patients that use the Products, as well as all
16 others exposed to the Products.

17 **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

18 27. On March 11, 2019, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety
19 Code § 25249.6 (the "Notice") to Defendant concerning the exposure of California citizens to
20 DEHP contained in the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendant
21 and to the California Attorney General's office and the offices of the County District attorneys and
22 City Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein the herein
23 violations allegedly occurred.

24 28. The Notice complied with all procedural requirements of Proposition 65 including
25 the attachment of a Certificate of Merit affirming that Plaintiff's counsel had consulted with at
26 least one person with relevant and appropriate expertise who reviewed relevant data regarding
27 DEHP exposure, and that counsel believed there was meritorious and reasonable cause for a private
28 action.

1 29. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff's best information and belief, none of
2 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted a
3 cause of action against Defendant under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which are
4 the subject of the Notice.

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

7 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

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

9 31. Plaintiff hereby repeats and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 30 of
10 this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

11 32. Defendant has, at all times mentioned herein, acted as distributor, and/or retailer of
12 the Product.

13 33. The Products contain DEHP, a hazardous chemical found on the Proposition 65 list
14 of chemicals known to be hazardous to human health.

15 34. The Product does not comply with the Proposition 65 warning requirements.

16 35. Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times
17 herein, and at least since March 11, 2019, continuing until the present, that Defendant has
18 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Product to
19 DEHP without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

20 36. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
21 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Product. Consequently, the primary route of
22 exposure to these chemicals is through dermal absorption. Users can be exposed to DEHP by
23 dermal absorption through direct skin contact with the Product during routine use when contacted
24 with bare hands. If the Product is contacted with wet hands or comes into contact with wet skin,
25 DEHP skin permeation rates from aqueous solutions are faster than neat DEHP permeation. Items
26 placed inside the Product can absorb DEHP that can be subsequently handled, held in direct contact
27 with skin, mouthed, or ingested by the user. DEHP from the Product can absorb to clothes placed
28 inside the Product and these clothes will become a source of DEHP dermal exposure when worn.

1 If the Product is stored or transported in a carrier, DEHP that leaches from the Product may
2 contaminate other articles contained within these closed spaces are subsequently handled, worn,
3 mouthed, or consumed. Finally, while direct mouthing of the Product does not seem likely, some
4 amount of exposure through ingestion can occur by touching of the user's hand to mouth.

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

8 38. Defendant has knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the
9 Product exposes individuals to DEHP, and Defendant intends that exposures to DEHP will occur
10 by its deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale and offering of
11 the Products to consumers in California

12 39. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this
13 Complaint.

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

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

1 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

2 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendant and requests the following
3 relief:

4 A. That the court assess civil penalties against each Defendant in the amount of \$2,500
5 per day for each violation for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per
6 violation of \$912,000.00) in accordance with Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b);

7 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendant mandating
8 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Product;

9 C. That the court grant Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs of suit, in the
10 amount of \$50,000.00.

11 D. That the court grant any further relief as may be just and proper.

12 Dated: March 11, 2020

BRODSKY & SMITH, LLC

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