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ELECTRONICALLY
FILED
Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco

08/31/2021
Clerk of the Court
BY: JACKIE LAPREVOTTE
Deputy Clerk

CGC-21-594850

SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

9 EMA BELL,

10 Plaintiff,

11 vs.

12 MONOPRICE, INC.,

13 Defendant.

Case No.:

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

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

14 Plaintiff Ema Bell (“Plaintiff”), by and through her attorneys, alleges the following cause
15 of action in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California.

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

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

23 2. This complaint is a representative action brought by Plaintiff in the public interest
24 of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People’s right to be informed of the health
25 hazards caused by exposure to di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), a toxic chemical found in
26 Monoprice dry bags manufactured, sold, and/or distributed by defendant Monoprice, Inc.
27 (“Monoprice” or the “Defendant”) in California.

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 manufactures, distributes, and/or offers for sale in
19 California, without a requisite exposure warning, Monoprice dry bags (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 injunction 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

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

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

4 **PARTIES**

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

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

12 13. Plaintiff alleges that defendant Monoprice 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 14. Venue is proper in the County of San Francisco because one or more of the
16 instances of wrongful conduct occurred, and continue to occur in this county and/or because
17 Defendant conducted, and continues to conduct, business in the County of San Francisco with
18 respect to the Products.

19 15. 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 enforcement
22 of violations of Proposition 65 in any Court of competent jurisdiction; therefore, this Court has
23 jurisdiction over this lawsuit.

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

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

3 **STATUTORY BACKGROUND**

4 17. The people of the State of California declared in Proposition 65 their right “[t]o be
5 informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive
6 harm.” (Section 1(b) of Initiative Measure, Proposition 65.)

7 18. To effect this goal, Proposition 65 requires that individuals be provided with a
8 “clear and reasonable warning” before being exposed to substances listed by the State of California
9 as causing cancer or reproductive toxicity. H&S Code § 25249.6 states, in pertinent part:

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

13 19. An exposure to a chemical in a consumer product is one “which results from a
14 person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other reasonably foreseeable use of a
15 consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a consumer service.” (27 CCR §
16 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the course of doing business ...
17 shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or transferred unless the product
18 is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

19 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

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

24
25
26
27 ¹ Alternatively, a person in the course of doing business may elect to comply with the warning
28 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.

8 21. Proposition 65 provides that any “person who violates or threatens to violate” the
9 statute may be enjoined in a court of competent jurisdiction. (H&S Code § 25249.7.) The phrase
10 “threaten to violate” is defined to mean creating “a condition in which there is a substantial
11 probability that a violation will occur.” (H&S Code § 25249.11(e).) Violators are liable for civil
12 penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day for each violation of the Act (H&S Code § 25249.7) for up to
13 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00).

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

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

21 23. The consumer exposures that are the subject of this Complaint result from through
22 dermal absorption. Users can be exposed to DEHP by dermal absorption through direct skin
23 contact with the Products when handled with bare hands. If the Products are handled with wet
24 hands or comes into contact with wet skin, DEHP skin permeation rates from aqueous solutions
25 are faster than neat DEHP permeation. If the Products are stored or transported in a carrier, DEHP
26 that leaches from the Products may contaminate other articles contained within these closed spaces
27 that are subsequently handled, worn, mouthed, or ingested by the user. Finally, while mouthing of

- 1 the Products does not seem likely, some amount of exposure through ingestion can occur by
- 2 handling of the Products with subsequent touching of the user's hand to mouth..

3 24. Defendant has manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell
4 and/or sold the Products in California since at least August 31, 2020. The Products continue to be
5 distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.

6 25. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant has knowingly and intentionally
7 exposed users and/or consumers of the Products to DEHP without first giving a clear and
8 reasonable exposure warning to such individuals.

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

SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

16 27. On August 31, 2020, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety
17 Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendant concerning the exposure of California citizens to
18 DEHP contained in the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendant
19 and to the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District attorneys and
20 City Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein the herein
21 violations allegedly occurred.

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

27 29. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff's best information and belief, none of
28 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted a

1 cause of action against Defendant under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which are
2 the subject of the Notice.

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

FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION

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

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

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

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

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

14 35. Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times
15 herein, and at least since August 31, 2020, continuing until the present, that Defendant has
16 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Product to
17 DEHP without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

18 36. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
19 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Products. Consequently, the primary route of
20 exposure to these chemicals is through dermal absorption. Users can be exposed to DEHP by
21 dermal absorption through direct skin contact with the Products when handled with bare hands. If
22 the Products are handled with wet hands or comes into contact with wet skin, DEHP skin
23 permeation rates from aqueous solutions are faster than neat DEHP permeation. If the Products are
24 stored or transported in a carrier, DEHP that leaches from the Products may contaminate other
25 articles contained within these closed spaces that are subsequently handled, worn, mouthed, or
26 ingested by the user. Finally, while mouthing of the Products does not seem likely, some amount
27 of exposure through ingestion can occur by handling of the Products with subsequent touching of
28 the user's hand to mouth.

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

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

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

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

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

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

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

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

20 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendant mandating
21 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Products:

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

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

25 | Dated: August 31, 2021

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