

Assigned for all purposes to: Stanley Mosk Courthouse, Judicial Officer: David Sotelo

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9 CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC.

10 **SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

11 **COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES**

12 CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC.,
13 in the public interest,

14 Plaintiff,

15 v.

16 EDEN FOODS, INC., a Michigan
17 Corporation;
18 and DOES 1-10,

19 Defendants.

CASE NO. **21STCV23004**

COMPLAINT FOR PENALTY AND
INJUNCTION

Violation of Proposition 65, the Safe
Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement
Act of 1986 (*Health & Safety Code*, §
25249.5, *et seq.*)

ACTION IS AN UNLIMITED CIVIL
CASE (exceeds \$25,000)

1 Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. alleges one cause of action against
2 defendants EDEN FOODS, INC., and DOES 1-10 as follows:

3 **THE PARTIES**

- 4 1. Plaintiff CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. (“Plaintiff” or “CAG”) is an
5 organization qualified to do business in the State of California. CAG is a person within
6 the meaning of Health and Safety Code Section 25249.11, subdivision (a). CAG, acting
7 as a private attorney general, brings this action in the public interest as defined under
8 Health and Safety Code Section 25249.7, subdivision (d).
- 9 2. Defendant EDEN FOODS, INC. (“EDEN FOODS”) is a Michigan Corporation doing
10 business in the State of California at all relevant times herein.
- 11 3. Plaintiff is presently unaware of the true names and capacities of defendants DOES 1-10,
12 and therefore sues these defendants by such fictitious names. Plaintiff will amend this
13 Complaint to allege their true names and capacities when ascertained. Plaintiff is
14 informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each fictitiously named defendant is
15 responsible in some manner for the occurrences herein alleged and the damages caused
16 thereby.
- 17 4. At all times mentioned herein, the term “Defendants” includes EDEN FOODS and
18 DOES 1-10.
- 19 5. Plaintiff is informed and believes, and thereon alleges that each of the Defendants at all
20 times mentioned herein have conducted business within the State of California.
- 21 6. Upon information and belief, at all times relevant to this action, each of the Defendants,
22 including DOES 1-10, was an agent, servant, or employee of each of the other
23 Defendants. In conducting the activities alleged in this Complaint, each of the
24 Defendants was acting within the course and scope of this agency, service, or
25 employment, and was acting with the consent, permission, and authorization of each of
26 the other Defendants. All actions of each of the Defendants alleged in this Complaint
27 were ratified and approved by every other Defendant or their officers or managing
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1 agents. Alternatively, each of the Defendants aided, conspired with and/or facilitated the
2 alleged wrongful conduct of each of the other Defendants.

- 3 7. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that at all relevant times, each of the
4 Defendants was a person doing business within the meaning of Health and Safety Code
5 Section 25249.11, subdivision (b), and that each of the Defendants had ten (10) or more
6 employees at all relevant times.

7 **JURISDICTION**

- 8 8. The Court has jurisdiction over this lawsuit pursuant to California Constitution Article
9 VI, Section 10, which grants the Superior Court original jurisdiction in all causes except
10 those given by statute to other trial courts. This Court has jurisdiction over this action
11 pursuant to Health and Safety Code Section 25249.7, which allows enforcement of
12 violations of Proposition 65 in any Court of competent jurisdiction.

- 13 9. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants named herein because Defendants either
14 reside or are located in this State or are foreign corporations authorized to do business in
15 California, are registered with the California Secretary of State, or who do sufficient
16 business in California, have sufficient minimum contacts with California, or otherwise
17 intentionally avail themselves of the markets within California through their
18 manufacture, distribution, promotion, marketing, or sale of their products within
19 California to render the exercise of jurisdiction by the California courts permissible
20 under traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

- 21 10. Venue is proper in the County of Los Angeles because one or more of the instances of
22 wrongful conduct occurred, and continues to occur, in the County of Los Angeles and/or
23 because Defendants conducted, and continue to conduct, business in the County of Los
24 Angeles with respect to the consumer product that is the subject of this action.

25 **BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARY FACTS**

- 26 11. In 1986, California voters approved an initiative to address growing concerns about
27 exposure to toxic chemicals and declared their right “[t]o be informed about exposures to
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1 chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm." Ballot Pamp.,
2 Proposed Law, Gen. Elec. (Nov. 4, 1986) at p. 3. The initiative, The Safe Drinking
3 Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified at Health and Safety Code Sections
4 25249.5, *et seq.* ("Proposition 65"), helps to protect California's drinking water sources
5 from contamination, to allow consumers to make informed choices about the products
6 they buy, and to enable persons to protect themselves from toxic chemicals as they see
7 fit.

8 12. Proposition 65 requires the Governor of California to publish a list of chemicals known
9 to the state to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm. *Health & Safety*
10 *Code* § 25249.8. The list, which the Governor updates at least once a year, contains over
11 700 chemicals and chemical families. Proposition 65 imposes warning requirements and
12 other controls that apply to Proposition 65-listed chemicals.

13 13. All businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate or sell products in California
14 must comply with Proposition 65. Under Proposition 65, businesses are: (1) prohibited
15 from knowingly discharging Proposition 65-listed chemicals into sources of drinking
16 water (*Health & Safety Code* § 25249.5), and (2) required to provide "clear and
17 reasonable" warnings before exposing a person, knowingly and intentionally, to a
18 Proposition 65-listed chemical (*Health & Safety Code* § 25249.6).

19 14. Proposition 65 provides that any person "violating or threatening to violate" the statute
20 may be enjoined in any court of competent jurisdiction. *Health & Safety Code* §
21 25249.7. "Threaten to violate" means "to create a condition in which there is a
22 substantial probability that a violation will occur." *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.11(e).
23 Defendants are also liable for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation,
24 recoverable in a civil action. *Health & Safety Code* § 25249.7(b).

25 15. Plaintiff identified certain practices of manufacturers and distributors of Sushi Nori of
26 exposing, knowingly and intentionally, persons in California to Lead and Lead
27 Compounds of such products without first providing clear and reasonable warnings of
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1 such to the exposed persons prior to the time of exposure. Plaintiff later discerned that
2 Defendants engaged in such practice.

3 16. On October 1, 1992 the Governor of California added Lead and Lead Compounds
4 (“Lead”) to the list of chemicals known to the State to cause cancer (*Cal. Code Regs. tit.*
5 27, § 27001(b)). Pursuant to Health and Safety Code Sections 25249.9 and 25249.10,
6 twenty (20) months after addition of Lead to the list of chemicals known to the State to
7 cause cancer, Lead became fully subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements and
8 discharge prohibitions.

9 17. On February 27, 1987, the Governor of California added Lead to the list of chemicals
10 known to the State to cause developmental and reproductive toxicity (*Cal. Code Regs.*
11 *tit. 27, § 27001(c)*). Lead is known to the State to cause developmental, female, and
12 male reproductive toxicity. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code Sections 25249.9 and
13 25249.10, twenty (20) months after addition of Lead to the list of chemicals known to
14 the State to cause developmental and reproductive toxicity, Lead became fully subject to
15 Proposition 65 warning requirements and discharge prohibitions.

16 **SATISFACTION OF PRIOR NOTICE**

17 18. Plaintiff served the following notices for alleged violations of Health and Safety Code
18 Section 25249.6, concerning consumer products exposures:

19 a. On or about October 8, 2020, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violations of
20 Health and Safety Code Section 25249.6, concerning consumer products
21 exposures subject to a private action to EDEN FOODS and to the California
22 Attorney General, County District Attorneys, and City Attorneys for each city
23 containing a population of at least 750,000 people in whose jurisdictions the
24 violations allegedly occurred, concerning the Sushi Nori.

25 19. Before sending the notice of alleged violations, Plaintiff investigated the consumer
26 products involved, the likelihood that such products would cause users to suffer
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1 significant exposures to Lead and Lead compounds, and the corporate structure of each
2 of the Defendants.

3 20. Plaintiff's notice of alleged violation included a Certificate of Merit executed by the
4 attorney for the noticing party, CAG. The Certificate of Merit stated that the attorney for
5 Plaintiff who executed the certificate had consulted with at least one person with relevant
6 and appropriate expertise who reviewed data regarding the exposures to Lead and Lead
7 compounds, the subject Proposition 65-listed chemical of this action. Based on that
8 information, the attorney for Plaintiff who executed the Certificate of Merit believed
9 there was a reasonable and meritorious case for this private action. The attorney for
10 Plaintiff attached to the Certificate of Merit served on the Attorney General the
11 confidential factual information sufficient to establish the basis of the Certificate of
12 Merit.

13 21. Plaintiff's notice of alleged violations also included a Certificate of Service and a
14 document entitled "The Safe Drinking Water & Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986
15 (Proposition 65) A Summary." *Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d)*.

16 22. Plaintiff is commencing this action more than sixty (60) days from the dates that Plaintiff
17 gave notice of the alleged violations to EDEN FOODS and the public prosecutors
18 referenced in Paragraph 19.

19 23. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that neither the Attorney General, nor
20 any applicable district attorney or city attorney has commenced and is diligently
21 prosecuting an action against the Defendants.

22 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

23 **(By CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC. and against EDEN FOODS and**
24 **DOES 1-10 for Violations of Proposition 65, The Safe Drinking Water and Toxic**
25 **Enforcement Act of 1986 (*Health & Safety Code, §§ 25249.5, et seq.*))**

26 **Seaweed**

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

1 25. Each of the Defendants is, and at all times mentioned herein was, a manufacturer,
2 distributor, promoter, or retailer of Sushi Nori (“Seaweed”), including but not limited to
3 “Eden ® Sushi Nori”; “Toasted Sea Vegetable”; “Net Wt. 0.6 oz. 17g 7 Sheets”;
4 “edenfoods.com/sushi”; “UPC 0 24182 15769 7”; “Product of Japan”;

5 26. Sushi Nori contains Lead.

6 27. Defendants knew or should have known that lead has been identified by the State of
7 California as a chemical known to cause cancer and reproductive toxicity and therefore
8 was subject to Proposition 65 warning requirements. Defendants were also informed of
9 the presence of lead in Sushi Nori within Plaintiff’s notice of alleged violations further
10 discussed above at Paragraph 18a.

11 28. Plaintiff’s allegations regarding Sushi Nori concerns “[c]onsumer products exposure[s],”
12 which “is an exposure that results from a person’s acquisition, purchase, storage,
13 consumption, or other reasonably foreseeable use of a consumer good, or any exposure
14 that results from receiving a consumer service.” *Cal. Code Regs. tit. 27, § 25602(b)*.
15 Sushi Nori is a consumer product, and, as mentioned herein, exposures to lead took place
16 as a result of such normal and foreseeable consumption and use.

17 29. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that between October 8, 2017 and the
18 present, each of the Defendants knowingly and intentionally exposed California
19 consumers and users of Sushi Nori, which Defendants manufactured, distributed, or sold
20 as mentioned above, to Lead, without first providing any type of clear and reasonable
21 warning of such to the exposed persons before the time of exposure. Defendants have
22 distributed and sold Sushi Nori in California. Defendants know and intend that
23 California consumers will use and consume Sushi Nori, thereby exposing them to Lead.
24 Further, Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that Defendants are selling
25 Sushi Nori under a brand or trademark that is owned or licensed by the Defendants or an
26 entity affiliated thereto; have knowingly introduced Lead into Sushi Nori or knowingly
27 caused lead to be created in Sushi Nori; have covered, obscured or altered a warning
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1 label that has been affixed to Sushi Nori by the manufacturer, producer, packager,
2 importer, supplier or distributor of Sushi Nori have received a notice and warning
3 materials for exposure from Sushi Nori without conspicuously posting or displaying the
4 warning materials; and/or have actual knowledge of potential exposure to Lead from
5 Sushi Nori. Defendants thereby violated Proposition 65.

6 30. The principal routes of exposure are through dermal contact, ingestion and inhalation.
7 Persons sustain exposures by handling Sushi Nori without wearing gloves or any other
8 personal protective equipment, or by touching bare skin or mucous membranes with
9 gloves after handling Sushi Nori, as well as through direct and indirect hand to mouth
10 contact, hand to mucous membrane, or breathing in particulate matter dispersed from
11 Sushi Nori.

12 31. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each of Defendants' violations of
13 Proposition 65 as to Sushi Nori have been ongoing and continuous, as Defendants
14 engaged and continue to engage in conduct which violates Health and Safety Code
15 Section 25249.6, including the manufacture, distribution, promotion, and sale of Sushi
16 Nori, so that a separate and distinct violation of Proposition 65 occurred each and every
17 time a person was exposed to Lead by Sushi Nori as mentioned herein.

18 32. Plaintiff is informed, believes, and thereon alleges that each violation of Proposition 65
19 mentioned herein is ever continuing. Plaintiff further alleges and believes that the
20 violations alleged herein will continue to occur into the future.

21 33. Based on the allegations herein, Defendants are liable for civil penalties of up to
22 \$2,500.00 per day per individual exposure to Lead from Sushi Nori pursuant to Health
23 and Safety Code Section 25249.7(b).

24 34. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the claims alleged herein prior to
25 filing this Complaint.

1 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

2 Plaintiff demands against each of the Defendants as follows:

- 3 1. A permanent injunction mandating Proposition 65-compliant warnings;
- 4 2. Penalties pursuant to Health and Safety Code Section 25249.7, subdivision (b);
- 5 3. Costs of suit;
- 6 4. Reasonable attorney fees and costs; and
- 7 5. Any further relief that the court may deem just and equitable.

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9 Dated: June 17, 2021

YEROUSHALMI & YEROUSHALMI*

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13 Reuben Yeroushalmi
14 Attorneys for Plaintiff,
15 CONSUMER ADVOCACY GROUP, INC.