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County of San Francisco
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SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

GABRIEL ESPINOZA,

Plaintiff,

vs.

DOVER SADDLERY, INC., TRACTOR
SUPPLY COMPANY,

Defendants.

Case No.:

CGC-21-590037

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

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

Plaintiff Gabriel Espinoza (“Plaintiff”), by and through his attorneys, alleges the following cause of action in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California.

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE

1. Plaintiff brings this representative action on behalf of all California citizens to enforce relevant portions of Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, codified at the Health and Safety Code § 25249.5 et seq (“Proposition 65”), which reads, in relevant part, “[n]o 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 ...”. Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

2. This complaint is a representative action brought by Plaintiff in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People’s right to be informed of the health hazards caused by exposure to chromium (hexavalent compounds) (“chromium (VI)”), a toxic chemical found in Dover Saddlery leather gloves sold and/or distributed by defendant Dover

1 Saddlery, Inc. (“Dover Saddlery”) and defendant Tractor Supply Company (“Tractor Supply”)
2 (collectively, the “Defendants”) in California.

3 3. Chromium (VI) is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause
4 cancer and adverse developmental effects in both males and females. On February 27, 1987, the
5 State of California listed chromium (VI) as a chemical known to the State to cause cancer and it
6 has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27,
7 § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 & 25249.10(b). On December 19, 2008, the State
8 of California listed chromium (VI) as a chemical known to cause adverse developmental effects
9 in both males and females.

10 4. Proposition 65 requires all businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate
11 within California or sell products therein to comply with Proposition 65 regulations. Included in
12 such regulations is the requirement that businesses must label any product containing a Proposition
13 65-listed chemical with a “clear and reasonable” warning before “knowingly and intentionally”
14 exposing any person to any such listed chemical.

15 5. Proposition 65 allows for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation
16 for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00) to be
17 imposed upon defendants in a civil action for violations of Proposition 65. Health & Safety Code
18 § 25249.7(b). Proposition 65 also allows for any court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin the
19 actions of a defendant which “violate or threaten to violate” the statute. Health & Safety Code §
20 25249.7.

21 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendants distribute and/or offer for sale in California,
22 without a requisite exposure warning, Dover Saddlery leather gloves (the “Products”) that expose
23 persons to chromium (VI).

24 7. Defendants’ failure to warn consumers and other individuals in California of the
25 health hazards associated with exposure to chromium (VI) in conjunction with the sale and/or
26 distribution of the Products is a violation of Proposition 65 and subjects Defendants to the
27 enjoinderment and civil penalties described herein.

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

9. Plaintiff also seeks injunctive relief, preliminarily and permanently, requiring Defendants to provide purchasers or users of the Products with required warnings related to the dangers and health hazards associated with exposure to chromium (VI) 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. He brings this action in the public interest pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(d).

12. Defendant Dover Saddlery, 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. Plaintiff alleges that defendant Dover Saddlery is a “person” in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

13. Defendant Tractor Supply, 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. Plaintiff alleges that defendant Tractor Supply 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 San Francisco because one or more of the instances of wrongful conduct occurred, and continue to occur in this county and/or because Defendants conducted, and continue to conduct, business in the County of San Francisco with respect to the Products.

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

6 16. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because each defendant is either a
7 citizen of the State of California, has sufficient minimum contacts with the State of California, is
8 registered with the California Secretary of State as foreign corporations authorized to do business
9 in the State of California, and/or has otherwise purposefully availed itself of the California market.
10 Such purposeful availment has rendered the exercise of jurisdiction by California courts consistent
11 and permissible with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice.

12 **STATUTORY BACKGROUND**

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

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

19 No 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 giving clear and reasonable warning to such individual...

21 19. An exposure to a chemical in a consumer product is one “which results from a
22 person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other reasonably foreseeable use of a
23 consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a consumer service.” (27 CCR §
24 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the course of doing business ...
25 shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or transferred unless the product
26 is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”
27
28

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.
- 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 February 27, 1987, the State of California listed chromium (VI) 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 December 19, 2008, the State of California listed chromium (VI) as a chemical

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.

1 known to cause adverse developmental effects in both males and females. In summary, the Listed
2 Chemical was listed under Proposition 65 as a chemical known to the State to cause cancer and
3 adverse developmental effects in both males and females.

4 23. The consumer exposures that are the subject of this Complaint result from through
5 dermal absorption. Increased duration of contact with the Products, natural aging of the Products,
6 temperature, light exposure, and contact of the Products with oxidizing agents and alkaline
7 solutions will result in increased conversion of chromium (III) to chromium(VI) in the Products
8 and thus increased dermal exposure to chromium (VI). Direct mouthing of the Products and indirect
9 hand to mouth exposure to chromium (VI) during use are possible additional chromium (VI)
10 exposure routes.

11 24. Defendants have manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell
12 and/or sold the Products in California since at least November 13, 2020. The Products continue to
13 be distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.

14 25. At all times relevant to this action, Defendants have knowingly and intentionally
15 exposed users, consumers and/or patients to the Products and the Listed Chemical without first
16 giving a clear and reasonable exposure warning to such individuals.

17 26. As a proximate result of acts by each defendant, as a person in the course of doing
18 business within the meaning of H&S Code § 25249.11, individuals throughout the State of
19 California, including in San Francisco County, have been exposed to the Listed Chemical without
20 a clear and reasonable warning on the Products. The individuals subject to the violative exposures
21 include normal and foreseeable users, consumers and patients that use the Products, as well as all
22 others exposed to the Products.

23 **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS**

24 27. On November 13, 2020, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and
25 Safety Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendants concerning the exposure of California citizens
26 to chromium (VI) contained in the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to
27 Defendants and to the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District
28

1 attorneys and City Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein
2 the herein violations allegedly occurred.

3 28. The Notice complied with all procedural requirements of Proposition 65 including
4 the attachment of a Certificate of Merit affirming that Plaintiff's counsel had consulted with at
5 least one person with relevant and appropriate expertise who reviewed relevant data regarding
6 chromium (VI) exposure, and that counsel believed there was meritorious and reasonable cause
7 for a private action.

8 29. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff's best information and belief, none of
9 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted a
10 cause of action against Defendants under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which
11 are the subject of the Notice.

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

14 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

15 **(By Plaintiff against Defendants for the Violation of Proposition 65)**

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

18 32. Defendants have, at all times mentioned herein, acted as distributor, and/or retailer
19 of the Products.

20 33. The Products contain chromium (VI), a hazardous chemical found on the
21 Proposition 65 list of chemicals known to be hazardous to human health.

22 34. The Products do not comply with the Proposition 65 warning requirements.

23 35. Plaintiff, based on his best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times
24 herein, and at least since November 13, 2020, continuing until the present, that Defendants have
25 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Products
26 to chromium (VI) without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

27 36. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
28 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Products. Consequently, the primary route of

1 exposure to these chemicals is through dermal exposure. Increased duration of contact with the
2 Products, natural aging of the Products, temperature, light exposure, and contact of the Products
3 with oxidizing agents and alkaline solutions will result in increased conversion of chromium (III)
4 to chromium(VI) in the Products and thus increased dermal exposure to chromium (VI).Direct
5 mouthing of the Products and indirect hand to mouth exposure to chromium (VI) during use are
6 possible additional chromium (VI) exposure routes.

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

10 38. Defendants have knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the
11 Product exposes individuals to chromium (VI), and Defendants intend that exposures to chromium
12 (VI) will occur by its deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale
13 and offering of the Products to consumers in California

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

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

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

1 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

2 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants 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 Defendants mandating
8 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Products;

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: February 25, 2021

BRODSKY & SMITH, LLC

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