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11 CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

12 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
13 COUNTY OF ALAMEDA

14 CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH,
15 a non-profit corporation,

16 Plaintiff,

17 v.

18 PRINCESS POLLY USA, INC.; and DOES 1
19 through 200, inclusive,

20 Defendants.

ELECTRONICALLY FILED

Superior Court of California,
County of Alameda

04/25/2022 at 11:48:53 AM

By: Cheryl Clark, Deputy Clerk

Case No. 22CV010343

**COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE
RELIEF AND CIVIL PENALTIES**

Health & Safety Code § 25249.6, *et seq.*

(Other)

1 Plaintiff Center for Environmental Health, in the public interest, based on information and
2 belief and investigation of counsel, except for information based on knowledge, hereby makes the
3 following allegations:

4 **INTRODUCTION**

5 1. This Complaint seeks to remedy Defendants' continuing failure to warn
6 individuals in California that they are being exposed to lead and lead compounds (collectively,
7 "Lead"). Lead is a chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and birth defects
8 and other reproductive harm. Such exposures have occurred, and continue to occur, through the
9 manufacture, distribution, sale, and/or use of belts made with leather, vinyl or imitation leather
10 materials (the "Products"). Individuals in California, including pregnant women and children, are
11 exposed to Lead when they wear, use, touch, or handle the Products.

12 2. Under California's Proposition 65, Health & Safety Code § 25249.5, *et seq.*, it is
13 unlawful for businesses to knowingly and intentionally expose individuals in California to
14 chemicals known to the State to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive harm without
15 providing clear and reasonable warnings to individuals prior to their exposure. Defendants
16 introduce Products contaminated with significant quantities of Lead into the California
17 marketplace, thereby exposing users of their Products, many of whom are pregnant women and
18 children, to Lead.

19 3. Despite the fact that Defendants expose pregnant women, children and other
20 people who come into contact with the Products to Lead, Defendants provide no warnings
21 whatsoever about these Lead exposures. Defendants' conduct thus violates the warning provision
22 of Proposition 65. Health & Safety Code § 25249.6.

23 **PARTIES**

24 4. Plaintiff CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ("CEH") is a non-profit
25 corporation dedicated to protecting the public from environmental health hazards and toxic
26 exposures. CEH is based in Oakland, California and incorporated under the laws of the State of
27 California. CEH is a "person" within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11(a) and
28 brings this enforcement action in the public interest pursuant to Health & Safety Code §

1 25249.7(d). CEH is a nationally recognized non-profit environmental advocacy group that has
2 prosecuted a large number of Proposition 65 cases in the public interest. These cases have
3 resulted in significant public benefit, including the reformulation of thousands of products to
4 remove toxic chemicals and to make them safer. CEH also provides information to Californians
5 about the health risks associated with exposure to hazardous substances, where manufacturers and
6 other responsible parties fail to do so.

7 5. Defendant PRINCESS POLLY USA, INC. is a person in the course of doing
8 business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. Defendant PRINCESS
9 POLLY USA, INC. manufactures, distributes, and/or sells Products for sale or use in California.

10 6. DOES 1 through 200 are each a person in the course of doing business within the
11 meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11. DOES 1 through 200 manufacture, distribute,
12 and/or sell Products for sale or use in California.

13 7. The true names of DOES 1 through 200 are either unknown to CEH at this time or
14 the applicable time period before which CEH may file a Proposition 65 action has not run. When
15 their identities are ascertained or the applicable time period before which CEH may file a
16 Proposition 65 action has run, the Complaint shall be amended to reflect their true names.

17 8. The defendant identified in paragraph 5 and DOES 1 through 200 are collectively
18 referred to herein as “Defendants.”

19 **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

20 9. The Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Health & Safety Code §
21 25249.7, which allows enforcement in any court of competent jurisdiction, and pursuant to
22 California Constitution Article VI, Section 10, because this case is a cause not given by statute to
23 other trial courts.

24 10. This Court has jurisdiction over Defendants because each is a business entity that
25 does sufficient business, has sufficient minimum contacts in California, or otherwise intentionally
26 avails itself of the California market through the sale, marketing, or use of the Products in
27 California and/or by having such other contacts with California so as to render the exercise of
28 jurisdiction over it by the California courts consistent with traditional notions of fair play and

1 substantial justice.

2 11. Venue is proper in Alameda County Superior Court because one or more of the
3 violations arise in the County of Alameda.

4 **BACKGROUND FACTS**

5 12. The People of the State of California have declared by initiative under Proposition
6 65 their right “[t]o be informed about exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects, or
7 other reproductive harm.” Proposition 65, § 1(b).

8 13. To effectuate this goal, Proposition 65 prohibits exposing people to chemicals
9 listed by the State of California as known to cause cancer, birth defects, or other reproductive
10 harm without a “clear and reasonable warning” unless the business responsible for the exposure
11 can prove that it fits within a statutory exemption. Health & Safety Code § 25249.6 states, in
12 pertinent part:

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

16 14. On February 27, 1987, the State of California officially listed lead as a chemical
17 known to cause reproductive toxicity. Lead is specifically identified as a reproductive toxicant
18 under three subcategories: “developmental reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the
19 developing fetus, “female reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the female reproductive
20 system, and “male reproductive toxicity,” which means harm to the male reproductive system. 27
21 Cal. Code Regs. (“C.C.R.”) § 27001(c). On February 27, 1988, one year after it was listed as a
22 chemical known to cause reproductive toxicity, lead became subject to the clear and reasonable
23 warning requirement regarding reproductive toxicants under Proposition 65. *Id.*; Health & Safety
24 Code § 25249.10(b).

25 15. On October 1, 1992, the State of California officially listed lead and lead
26 compounds as chemicals known to cause cancer. On October 1, 1993, one year after they were
27 listed as chemicals known to cause cancer, lead and lead compounds became subject to the clear
28 and reasonable warning requirement regarding carcinogens under Proposition 65. 27 C.C.R. §

1 27001(b); Health & Safety Code § 25249.10(b).

2 16. Young children are especially susceptible to the toxic effects of Lead. Children
3 show a greater sensitivity to Lead's effects than do adults. Adverse health impacts from Lead
4 exposure generally occur in children at lower blood Lead levels than in adults. Children absorb
5 and retain more Lead in proportion to their weight than do adults. Young children also show a
6 greater prevalence of iron deficiency, a condition that can increase gastrointestinal absorption of
7 Lead. The body accumulates Lead over a lifetime and releases it slowly, so even small doses
8 received in childhood, over time, can cause adverse health impacts, including but not limited to
9 reproductive toxicity, later in life. For example, in times of physiological stress, such as
10 pregnancy, the body can mobilize accumulated stores of Lead in tissue and bone, thereby
11 increasing the level of Lead in the blood and increasing the risk of harm to the fetus.

12 17. There is no safe level of exposure to Lead and even minute amounts of Lead
13 exposure have been shown to permanently reduce mental capacity. Studies have repeatedly
14 concluded that concentrations of Lead in children's blood previously deemed acceptable can have
15 adverse health effects. *See, e.g.,* Canfield, R.L., *et al.*, "Intellectual Impairment in Children with
16 Blood Lead Concentrations below 10 ug per Deciliter," *New England Journal of Medicine*
17 348:16, 2003. Another study found that childhood Lead exposure predicts intellectual
18 functioning in early adulthood in that adult IQ levels are inversely associated with blood Lead
19 concentrations from childhood. Mazumdar, M., *et al.*, "Low-Level Environmental Lead
20 Exposure in Childhood and Adult Intellectual Function: A Follow-Up Study," *Environmental*
21 *Health* 10:24, 2011; *see also* Lanphear, B.P., *et al.*, "Subclinical Lead Toxicity in U.S. Children
22 and Adolescents," *Neurodevelopmental Disabilities II Platform*, 2000 (concluded that even the
23 smallest detectable amount of blood Lead levels in children can mean the difference between an
24 A or B grade in school).

25 18. Lead exposures for pregnant women are also of particular concern in light of
26 evidence that even short-term Lead exposures *in utero* may have long-term harmful effects. Hu,
27 H., *et al.*, "Fetal Lead Exposure at Each State of Pregnancy as a Predictor of Infant Mental
28 Development," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 114:11, 2006; Schnaas, L., *et al.*, "Reduced

1 Intellectual Development in Children with Prenatal Lead Exposure,” *Environmental Health*
2 *Perspectives* 114:5, 2006.

3 19. The problem of Lead in fashion accessories such as the Products is an industry-
4 wide problem. As the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
5 (“OEHHA”) has found, “[p]otentially unsafe levels of lead in products such as jewelry and
6 fashion accessories imported into the U.S. still pose a significant concern.” OEHHA, Initial
7 Statement of Reasons for Proposed Adoption of New Title 27, Article 6, at 20 (Jan. 16, 2015).

8 20. The Products are made of materials and components that contain Lead. Lead is
9 found in the Products as a stabilizer in the vinyl or imitation leather materials, as a chemical
10 ingredient in some of the dyes, paints, and other coloring agents used in the Products, and in the
11 chemicals used in the leather tanning process. Lead is also found in metallic components such as
12 buckles used on the Products.

13 21. Defendants’ Products contain sufficient quantities of Lead such that individuals,
14 including pregnant women and children, who wear, use, touch, and/or handle the Products are
15 exposed to Lead through the average use of such Products. The routes of exposure for the
16 violations are ingestion via hand-to-mouth contact after consumers touch and/or handle the
17 Products, and dermal absorption directly through the skin when consumers take on or off the
18 Products or wear, touch, and/or handle Products.

19 22. Some of the Products are designed for and marketed to children. Young children
20 are also exposed to Lead from the Products when they touch or play with Products that are owned
21 or used by their parents or caretakers. Additional childhood exposures to Lead occur when
22 children touch their hands to their mouths after their hands have touched the Products.

23 23. No clear and reasonable warning is provided with the Products regarding the
24 exposures to Lead which occur through ordinary use of the Products.

25 24. Any person acting in the public interest has standing to enforce violations of
26 Proposition 65 provided that such person has supplied the requisite public enforcers with a valid
27 60-Day Notice of Violation and such public enforcers are not diligently prosecuting the action
28 within such time. Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d).

1 25. More than sixty days prior to naming each Defendant in this lawsuit, CEH
2 provided a 60-Day “Notice of Violation of Proposition 65” to the California Attorney General, to
3 the District Attorneys of every county in California, to the City Attorneys of every California city
4 with a population greater than 750,000, and to each of the named Defendants. In compliance with
5 Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 27 C.C.R. § 25903(b), each Notice included the
6 following information: (1) the name and address of each violator; (2) the statute violated; (3) the
7 time period during which violations occurred; (4) specific descriptions of the violations, including
8 (a) the routes of exposure to listed chemicals from the Products, and (b) the specific type of
9 Products sold and used in violation of Proposition 65; and (5) the name of the specific Proposition
10 65-listed chemical that is the subject of the violations described in each Notice.

11 26. CEH also sent a Certificate of Merit for each Notice to the California Attorney
12 General, to the District Attorneys of every county in California, to the City Attorneys of every
13 California city with a population greater than 750,000, and to each of the named Defendants. In
14 compliance with Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3101, each Certificate
15 certified that CEH’s counsel: (1) has consulted with one or more persons with relevant and
16 appropriate experience or expertise who reviewed facts, studies, or other data regarding the
17 exposures to Lead alleged in each Notice; and (2) based on the information obtained through such
18 consultations, believes that there is a reasonable and meritorious case for a citizen enforcement
19 action based on the facts alleged in each Notice. In compliance with Health & Safety Code §
20 25249.7(d) and 11 C.C.R. § 3102, each Certificate served on the Attorney General included
21 factual information – provided on a confidential basis – sufficient to establish the basis for the
22 Certificate, including the identity of the person(s) consulted by CEH’s counsel and the facts,
23 studies, or other data reviewed by such persons.

24 27. None of the public prosecutors with the authority to prosecute violations of
25 Proposition 65 has commenced and/or is diligently prosecuting a cause of action against
26 Defendants under Health & Safety Code § 25249.5, *et seq.*, based on the claims asserted in
27 CEH’s Notices.

28 28. Defendants both know and intend that consumers in California, including pregnant

1 women and children, will wear, use, touch, and/or handle the Products, thus exposing them to
2 Lead through the average use of the Products.

3 29. Nevertheless, Defendants continue to expose consumers, including pregnant
4 women and children, to Lead without prior clear and reasonable warnings regarding the
5 carcinogenic and reproductive hazards of Lead.

6 30. CEH has engaged in good-faith efforts to resolve the claims alleged herein prior to
7 filing this Complaint.

8 31. Any person “violating or threatening to violate” Proposition 65 may be enjoined in
9 any court of competent jurisdiction. Health & Safety Code § 25249.7. “Threaten to violate” is
10 defined to mean “to create a condition in which there is a substantial probability that a violation
11 will occur.” Health & Safety Code § 25249.11(e). Proposition 65 provides for civil penalties not
12 to exceed \$2,500 per day for each violation of Proposition 65.

13 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**
14 **(Violations of Health & Safety Code § 25249.6)**

15 32. CEH realleges and incorporates by reference as if specifically set forth herein
16 Paragraphs 1 through 31, inclusive.

17 33. Lead is a chemical listed by the State of California as known to cause cancer, birth
18 defects, and other reproductive harm.

19 34. By placing their Products into the stream of commerce, each Defendant is a person
20 in the course of doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code § 25249.11.

21 35. Defendants know that the average use of their Products will expose users of their
22 Products to Lead. Defendants intend that the Products be used in a manner that results in users of
23 their Products being exposed to the Lead contained therein.

24 36. Defendants have failed, and continue to fail, to provide clear and reasonable
25 warnings to users of their Products regarding the exposures to Lead which occur from use of the
26 Products.

27 37. By committing the acts alleged above, Defendants have at all times relevant to this
28 Complaint violated Proposition 65 by knowingly and intentionally exposing individuals to Lead

1 without first giving clear and reasonable warnings to such individuals regarding those exposures.

2 Wherefore, CEH prays for judgment against Defendants, as set forth hereafter.

3 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

4 Wherefore, CEH prays for judgment against Defendants as follows:

5 1. That the Court, pursuant to Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(a), preliminarily and
6 permanently enjoin Defendants from offering the Products for sale in California without
7 providing prior clear and reasonable warnings, as CEH shall specify in further application to the
8 Court;

9 2. That the Court, pursuant to Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(a), order Defendants
10 to take action to stop ongoing unwarned exposures to Lead resulting from use of Products sold by
11 Defendants, as CEH shall specify in further application to the Court;

12 3. That the Court, pursuant to Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(b), assess civil
13 penalties against each Defendant in the amount of \$2,500 per day for each violation of
14 Proposition 65 according to proof;

15 4. That the Court, pursuant to Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5 or any other
16 applicable theory, grant CEH its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs of suit; and

17 5. That the Court grant such other and further relief as may be just and proper.

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19 Dated: April 25, 2022

Respectfully submitted,

20 LEXINGTON LAW GROUP

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23 _____
24 Howard Hirsch
25 Attorneys for Plaintiff
26 CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH