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ELECTRONICALLY
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Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco

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Clerk of the Court
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Deputy Clerk

9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

CGC-23-609575

10 COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

11 PRECILA BALABBO,

12 Plaintiff,

13 vs.

14 GREENBRIER INTERNATIONAL,
15 INC., DOLLAR TREE STORES, INC.,
16 DOLLAR TREE, INC.,

17 Defendants.

Case No.:

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

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

18 Plaintiff Precila Balabbo (“Plaintiff”), by and through her attorneys, alleges the following
19 cause of action in the public interest of the citizens of the State of California.

20 **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

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

28 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 di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), a toxic chemical found in *Jot*™

1 3 ring binders, UPC # 639277721136, sold and/or distributed by defendants Dollar Tree Stores,
2 Inc., Dollar Tree, Inc. (collectively, “Dollar Tree”), and/or Greenbrier International, Inc.
3 (“Greenbrier”) in California. Greenbrier and Dollar Tree are collectively referred to herein as, the
4 “Defendants” and each a “Defendant.”

5 3. DEHP is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer and
6 birth defects or other reproductive harm. On January 1, 1988, the State of California listed DEHP
7 as a chemical known to the State to cause cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition
8 65 regulations since that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§
9 25249.8 & 25249.10(b). On October 24, 2003, the State of California listed DEHP as a chemical
10 known to cause birth defects or other reproductive harm.

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

17 5. Proposition 65 allows for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation
18 for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00) to be
19 imposed upon defendants in a civil action for violations of Proposition 65. Health & Safety Code
20 § 25249.7(b). Proposition 65 also allows for any court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin the
21 actions of a defendant which “violate or threaten to violate” the statute. Health & Safety Code §
22 25249.7.

23 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendants distribute and/or offer for sale in California,
24 without a requisite exposure warning, *Jot*TM 3 ring binders, UPC # 639277721136, (the “Products”)
25 that expose persons to DEHP when used for their intended purpose.

26 7. Defendants’ failure to warn consumers and other individuals in California of the
27 health hazards associated with exposure to DEHP in conjunction with the sale and/or distribution
28

1 of the Products is a violation of Proposition 65 and subjects Defendants to the enjoinder and civil
2 penalties described herein.

3 8. Plaintiff seeks civil penalties against Defendants for their violations of Proposition
4 65 in accordance with Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b).

5 9. Plaintiff also seeks injunctive relief, preliminarily and permanently, requiring
6 Defendants to provide purchasers or users of the Products with required warnings related to the
7 dangers and health hazards associated with exposure to DEHP pursuant to Health and Safety Code
8 § 25249.7(a).

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

10 **PARTIES**

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

15 12. Defendant Greenbrier, through its business, effectively imports, distributes, sells,
16 and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California, or it implies by its conduct that
17 it imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California.
18 Plaintiff alleges that defendant Greenbrier is a "person" in the course of doing business within the
19 meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

20 13. Defendant Dollar Tree Stores, Inc., through its business, effectively imports,
21 distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California, or it implies
22 by its conduct that it imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the
23 State of California. Plaintiff alleges that defendant Dollar Tree Stores, Inc. is a "person" in the
24 course of doing business within the meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and
25 25249.11.

26 14. Defendant Dollar Tree, Inc., through its business, effectively imports, distributes,
27 sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California, or it implies by its conduct
28 that it imports, distributes, sells, and/or offers the Products for sale or use in the State of California.

1 Plaintiff alleges that defendant Dollar Tree, Inc. is a “person” in the course of doing business
2 within the meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

3 VENUE AND JURISDICTION

4 15. Venue is proper in the County of San Francisco because one or more of the
5 instances of wrongful conduct occurred and continue to occur in this county and/or because
6 Defendants conducted, and continue to conduct, business in the County of San Francisco with
7 respect to the Products.

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

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

19 STATUTORY BACKGROUND

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

23 19. To effect this goal, Proposition 65 requires that individuals be provided with a
24 “clear and reasonable warning” before being exposed to substances listed by the State of California
25 as causing cancer and birth defects or other reproductive harm. H&S Code § 25249.6 states, in
26 pertinent part:

27 No person in the course of doing business shall knowingly and intentionally expose any
28 individual to a chemical known to the state to cause cancer and birth defects or other
reproductive harm without first giving clear and reasonable warning to such individual...

1
2 20. An exposure to a chemical in a consumer product is one “which results from a
3 person’s acquisition, purchase, storage, consumption or other reasonably foreseeable use of a
4 consumer good, or any exposure that results from receiving a consumer service.” (27 CCR §
5 25602, para (b).) H&S Code § 25603(c) states that “a person in the course of doing business ...
6 shall provide a warning to any person to whom the product is sold or transferred unless the product
7 is packaged or labeled with a clear and reasonable warning.”

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

- 10 a. A warning that appears on a product’s label or other labeling.
- 11 b. Identification of the product at the retail outlet in a manner which provides
12 a warning. Identification may be through shelf labeling, signs, menus, or a combination
13 thereof.
- 14 c. The warnings provided pursuant to subparagraphs (a) and (b) shall be
15 prominently placed upon a product’s labels or other labeling or displayed at the retail outlet
16 with such conspicuousness, as compared with other words, statements, designs, or devices
17 in the label, labeling or display as to render it likely to be read and understood by an
18 ordinary individual under customary conditions of purchase or use.
- 19 d. A system of signs, public advertising identifying the system and toll-free
20 information services, or any other system that provides clear and reasonable warnings.

21 22. Proposition 65 provides that any “person who violates or threatens to violate” the
22 statute may be enjoined in a court of competent jurisdiction. (H&S Code § 25249.7.) The phrase
23 “threaten to violate” is defined to mean creating “a condition in which there is a substantial
24 probability that a violation will occur.” (H&S Code § 25249.11(e).) Violators are liable for civil
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.

1 penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day for each violation of the Act (H&S Code § 25249.7) for up to
2 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00).

3 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

4 23. On January 1, 1988, the State of California listed DEHP as a chemical known to
5 the State to cause cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations since
6 that time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 & 25249.10(b).
7 On October 24, 2003, the State of California listed DEHP as a chemical known to cause birth
8 defects or other reproductive harm.

9 24. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
10 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Product. The primary route of exposure to the
11 is through dermal absorption directly through the skin when consumers use, touch, or handle the
12 Products. Exposure through ingestion will occur by touching the Product with subsequent touching
13 of the user's hand to mouth. No clear and reasonable warning is provided with the Products
14 regarding the health hazards of exposure.

15 25. Defendants have manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell
16 and/or sold the Products in California since at least October 14, 2022. The Products continue to be
17 distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.

18 26. At all times relevant to this action, Defendants have knowingly and intentionally
19 exposed users of the Products to DEHP without first giving a clear and reasonable exposure
20 warning to such individuals.

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

SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

1
2 28. Plaintiff purchased the Product from Dollar Tree. At the time of purchase, Dollar
3 Tree and Greenbrier did not provide a Proposition 65 exposure warning for DEHP or any other
4 Proposition 65 listed chemical in a manner consistent with H&S Code § 25603.1 as described
5 *supra*.

6 29. The Product was sent to a testing laboratory for phthalate testing to determine the
7 phthalate content of the Product.

8 30. The laboratory provided the results of its analysis. Results of this test determined
9 the Product exposes users to DEHP (the “Chemical Test Report”).

10 31. Plaintiff provided the Chemical Test Report and Product to an analytical chemist
11 to determine if, based on the findings of the Chemical Test Report and the reasonable and
12 foreseeable use of the Product, exposure to DEHP will occur at levels that require Proposition 65
13 warnings under the Clear and Reasonable Warnings section 25601 of Title 27 of the California
14 Code of Regulations.

15 32. On October 14, 2022, Plaintiff received from the analytical chemist an exposure
16 assessment report which concluded that persons in California who use the Products will be exposed
17 to levels of DEHP that require a Proposition 65 exposure warning.

18 33. On October 14, 2022, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety
19 Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendants concerning the exposure of California citizens to
20 DEHP from use of the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendants
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 34. 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 44. Defendants have knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the
2 Products exposes individuals to DEHP, and Defendants intend that exposures to DEHP will occur
3 by their deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale and offering
4 of the Products to consumers in California

5 45. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this
6 Complaint.

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

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

11 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

12 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff demands judgment against Defendants and requests the following
13 relief:

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

17 B. That the court preliminarily and permanently enjoin Defendants mandating
18 Proposition 65 compliant warnings on the Products;

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

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

22 Dated: October 6, 2023

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