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ELECTRONICALLY
FILED
Superior Court of California,
County of San Francisco

01/23/2025
Clerk of the Court
BY: SAHAR ENAYATI
Deputy Clerk

9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

10 COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

11 EMA BELL,

12 Plaintiff,

13 vs.

14 COTY INC.,

15 Defendant.

Case No.:

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

CGC-25-621705

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

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

18 **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

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

25 2. This complaint is a representative action brought by Plaintiff in the public interest
26 of the citizens of the State of California to enforce the People’s right to be informed of the health
27 hazards caused by exposure to diethanolamine (DEA), a toxic chemical found in hand creams,
28 including Philosophy Hand of Hope coconut and guava hand cream, sold and/or distributed by
defendant Coty Inc. (“Coty” or “Defendant”) in California.

1 3. DEA is a harmful chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer. On
2 June 22, 2012, the State of California listed DEA as a chemical known to the State to cause cancer
3 and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations since that time. Cal. Code Regs.
4 Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 & 25249.10(b).

5 4. Proposition 65 requires all businesses with ten (10) or more employees that operate
6 within California or sell products therein to comply with Proposition 65 regulations. Included in
7 such regulations is the requirement that businesses must label any product containing a Proposition
8 65-listed chemical that will create an exposure above safe harbor levels with a “clear and
9 reasonable” warning before “knowingly and intentionally” exposing any person to any such listed
10 chemical.

11 5. Proposition 65 allows for civil penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day per violation
12 for up to 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00) to be
13 imposed upon defendants in a civil action for violations of Proposition 65. Health & Safety Code
14 § 25249.7(b). Proposition 65 also allows for any court of competent jurisdiction to enjoin the
15 actions of a defendant which “violate or threaten to violate” the statute. Health & Safety Code §
16 25249.7.

17 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendant distributes and/or offers for sale in California,
18 without a requisite exposure warning, hand creams, including Philosophy Hand of Hope coconut
19 and guava hand cream (the “Products”) that expose persons to DEA when used for their intended
20 purpose.

21 7. Defendant’s failure to warn consumers and other individuals in California of the
22 health hazards associated with exposure to DEA in conjunction with the sale and/or distribution
23 of the Products is a violation of Proposition 65 and subjects Defendant to the enjoinder 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 DEA 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 Coty Inc., 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 Plaintiff alleges that defendant Coty Inc. is a "person" in the course of doing business within the
13 meaning of Health & Safety Code sections 25249.6 and 25249.11.

14 **VENUE AND JURISDICTION**

15 13. 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 14. 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 15. 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 16. 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 17. 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 and birth defects or other reproductive harm. H&S Code § 25249.6 states, in
10 pertinent part:

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

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

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

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

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 c. The warnings provided pursuant to subparagraphs (a) and (b) shall be
2 prominently placed upon a product's labels or other labeling or displayed at the retail outlet
3 with such conspicuousness, as compared with other words, statements, designs, or devices
4 in the label, labeling or display as to render it likely to be read and understood by an
5 ordinary individual under customary conditions of purchase or use.

6 d. A system of signs, public advertising identifying the system and toll-free
7 information services, or any other system that provides clear and reasonable warnings.

8 20. 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).

14 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

15 21. On June 22, 2012, the State of California listed DEA as a chemical known to the
16 State to cause cancer and it has come under the purview of Proposition 65 regulations since that
17 time. Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 27, § 27001(c); Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.8 & 25249.10(b).

18 22. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
19 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Product. The primary route of exposure to DEA
20 is through dermal exposure. Some amount of exposure through ingestion can occur by touching
21 the Product with subsequent touching of the user's hand to mouth. No clear and reasonable warning
22 is provided with the Products regarding the health hazards of exposure to DEA.

23 23. Defendant has manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell
24 and/or sold the Products in California since at least January 24, 2024. The Products continue to be
25 distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.

26 24. At all times relevant to this action, Defendant has knowingly and intentionally
27 exposed users of the Products to DEA without first giving a clear and reasonable exposure warning
28 to such individuals.

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

3 32. 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 DEA exposure, and that counsel believed there was meritorious and reasonable cause for a private
7 action.

8 33. 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 Defendant under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which are
11 the subject of the Notice.

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

14 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

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

16 35. Plaintiff hereby repeats and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 34 of
17 this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

18 36. Defendant has, at all times mentioned herein, acted as distributor, and/or retailer of
19 the Products.

20 37. Use of the Products will expose users and consumers thereof to DEA, a hazardous
21 chemical found on the Proposition 65 list of chemicals known to be hazardous to human health.

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

23 39. Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times
24 herein, and at least since January 24, 2024, continuing until the present, that Defendant has
25 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Products
26 to DEA without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

27 40. The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,
28 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Product. The primary route of exposure to DEA

1 is through dermal exposure. Some amount of exposure through ingestion can occur by touching
2 the Product with subsequent touching of the user's hand to mouth. No clear and reasonable warning
3 is provided with the Products regarding the health hazards of exposure to DEA.

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

7 42. Defendant has knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the
8 Products exposes individuals to DEA, and Defendant intends that exposures to DEA will occur by
9 its deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale and offering of the
10 Products to consumers in California

11 43. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this
12 Complaint.

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

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

1 **PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

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

4 A. That the court assess civil penalties against Defendant in the amount of \$2,500 per
5 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 Defendant 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: January 23, 2025

BRODSKY SMITH

13 By:  _____

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