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ELECTRONICALLY  
**FILED**  
Superior Court of California,  
County of San Francisco

**12/05/2024**  
Clerk of the Court  
BY: SAHAR ENAYATI  
Deputy Clerk

9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

10 COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

11 **CGC-24-620321**

12 EMA BELL,

13 Plaintiff,

14 vs.

15 ALVA/AMCO PHARMACAL  
16 COMPANIES, LLC, ALBERTSONS  
17 COMPANIES, INC.,

18 Defendants.

Case No.:

**COMPLAINT FOR CIVIL PENALTIES AND  
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

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

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

21 **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

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

1 sold and/or distributed by defendants Alva/Amco Pharmacial Companies, LLC and/or Albertsons  
2 Companies, Inc. (collectively, “Defendants” and each a “Defendant”) in California.

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

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

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

19 6. Plaintiff alleges that Defendants distribute and/or offer for sale in California,  
20 without a requisite exposure warning, Prosacea gels (the “Products”) that expose persons to DEA  
21 when used for their intended purpose.

22 7. Defendants’ failure to warn consumers and other individuals in California of the  
23 health hazards associated with exposure to DEA in conjunction with the sale and/or distribution  
24 of the Products is a violation of Proposition 65 and subjects Defendants to the enjoinder and civil  
25 penalties described herein.

26 8. Plaintiff seeks civil penalties against Defendants for their violations of Proposition  
27 65 in accordance with Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(b).



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.

#### **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 and birth defects or other reproductive harm. H&S Code § 25249.6 states, in  
19 pertinent part:

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

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

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

3 a. A warning that appears on a product's label or other labeling.

4 b. Identification of the product at the retail outlet in a manner which provides  
5 a warning. Identification may be through shelf labeling, signs, menus, or a combination  
6 thereof.

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

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

14 21. Proposition 65 provides that any "person who violates or threatens to violate" the  
15 statute may be enjoined in a court of competent jurisdiction. (H&S Code § 25249.7.) The phrase  
16 "threaten to violate" is defined to mean creating "a condition in which there is a substantial  
17 probability that a violation will occur." (H&S Code § 25249.11(e).) Violators are liable for civil  
18 penalties of up to \$2,500.00 per day for each violation of the Act (H&S Code § 25249.7) for up to  
19 365 days (up to a maximum civil penalty amount per violation of \$912,000.00).

20 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

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

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27 <sup>1</sup> 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           23.     The exposures that are the subject of the Notice result from the purchase,  
2 acquisition, handling and recommended use of the Product. The primary route of exposure to DEA  
3 is through dermal exposure. Some amount of exposure through ingestion can occur by touching  
4 the Product with subsequent touching of the user’s hand to mouth. No clear and reasonable warning  
5 is provided with the Products regarding the health hazards of exposure to DEA.

6           24.     Defendants have manufactured, processed, marketed, distributed, offered to sell  
7 and/or sold the Products in California since at least March 27, 2024. The Products continue to be  
8 distributed and sold in California without the requisite warning information.

9           25.     At all times relevant to this action, Defendants have knowingly and intentionally  
10 exposed users of the Products to DEA without first giving a clear and reasonable exposure warning  
11 to such individuals.

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

18   **SATISFACTION OF NOTICE REQUIREMNTS**

19          27.     On February 15, 2024, Plaintiff purchased the Product from Albertsons Companies,  
20 Inc. At the time of purchase, Defendants did not provide a Proposition 65 exposure warning for  
21 DEA or any other Proposition 65 listed chemical in a manner consistent with H&S Code § 25603.1  
22 as described *supra*.

23          28.     On March 13, 2024, the Product was sent to a testing laboratory for diethanolamine  
24 to determine the DEA content of the Product.

25          29.     On March 15, 2024, the laboratory provided the results of its analysis. Results of  
26 this test determined the Product exposes users to DEA (the “Chemical Test Report”).

27          30.     Plaintiff provided the Chemical Test Report and Product to an analytical chemist  
28 to determine if, based on the findings of the Chemical Test Report and the reasonable and

1 foreseeable use of the Product, exposure to DEA will occur at levels that require Proposition 65  
2 warnings under the Clear and Reasonable Warnings section 25601 of Title 27 of the California  
3 Code of Regulations.

4 31. On March 27, 2024, Plaintiff received from the analytical chemist an exposure  
5 assessment report which concluded that persons in California who use the Products will be exposed  
6 to levels of DEA that require a Proposition 65 exposure warning.

7 32. On March 27, 2024, Plaintiff gave notice of alleged violation of Health and Safety  
8 Code § 25249.6 (the “Notice”) to Defendants concerning the exposure of California citizens to  
9 DEA from use of the Products without proper warning, subject to a private action to Defendants  
10 and to the California Attorney General’s office and the offices of the County District attorneys and  
11 City Attorneys for each city with a population greater than 750,000 persons wherein the herein  
12 violations allegedly occurred.

13 33. The Notice complied with all procedural requirements of Proposition 65 including  
14 the attachment of a Certificate of Merit affirming that Plaintiff’s counsel had consulted with at  
15 least one person with relevant and appropriate expertise who reviewed relevant data regarding  
16 DEA exposure, and that counsel believed there was meritorious and reasonable cause for a private  
17 action.

18 34. After receiving the Notice, and to Plaintiff’s best information and belief, none of  
19 the noticed appropriate public enforcement agencies have commenced and diligently prosecuted a  
20 cause of action against Defendants under Proposition 65 to enforce the alleged violations which  
21 are the subject of the Notice.

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

24 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

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

26 36. Plaintiff hereby repeats and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 35 of  
27 this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

1           37. Defendants have, at all times mentioned herein, acted as distributor, and/or retailer  
2 of the Products.

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

5           39. The Products do not comply with the Proposition 65 warning requirements.

6           40. Plaintiff, based on her best information and belief, avers that at all relevant times  
7 herein, and at least since March 27, 2024, continuing until the present, that Defendants have  
8 continued to knowingly and intentionally expose California users and consumers of the Products  
9 to DEA without providing required warnings under Proposition 65.

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

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

18          43. Defendants have knowledge that the normal and reasonably foreseeable use of the  
19 Products exposes individuals to DEA, and Defendants intend that exposures to DEA will occur by  
20 its deliberate, non-accidental participation in the importation, distribution, sale and offering of the  
21 Products to consumers in California

22          44. Plaintiff has engaged in good faith efforts to resolve the herein claims prior to this  
23 Complaint.

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

27          46. Pursuant to Health and Safety Code § 25249.7(a), this Court is specifically  
28 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: December 5, 2024

BRODSKY SMITH

13 By:  \_\_\_\_\_

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