

SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Parties. This Settlement Agreement is entered into by and between Precila Balabbo (“Balabbo”) and TreeWorks. Together, Balabbo and TreeWorks are collectively referred to as the “Parties” and may be individually referred to as “Party.” Balabbo is an individual who resides in the State of California, and seeks to promote awareness of exposures to toxic chemicals and to improve human health by reducing or eliminating hazardous substances contained in consumer products. Balabbo alleges that TreeWorks is a person in the course of doing business for purposes of the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986, Health & Safety Code § 25249.6, et seq. (“Proposition 65”).

1.2 General Allegations. Balabbo alleges that TreeWorks has exposed individuals to the chemical diisononyl phthalate (DINP) from its sales of TreeWorks instruments without first providing users and consumers of the product with a clear and reasonable health hazard exposure warning as required pursuant to Proposition 65. DINP is listed pursuant to Proposition 65 as a chemical known to the State of California to cause cancer.

1.3 Product Description. The products covered by this Settlement Agreement are Treeworks instruments that have been imported, distributed, offered for sale and/or sold in California by TreeWorks (the “Products” or individually, “Product”).

1.4 Notice of Violation. On October 12, 2021, Balabbo served TreeWorks, Bernist L. McMichen dba Treeworks, Sam Ash Music Corporation, and various public enforcement agencies with a document entitled “Notice of Violation of California Health & Safety Code § 25249.6, et seq.” (the “Notice”). The Notice provided TreeWorks and such others, including public enforcers, with notice that alleged that TreeWorks was in violation of California Health & Safety Code § 25249.6, for failing to warn California consumers and customers that use of the Products will expose them to DINP. No public enforcer has diligently prosecuted the allegations set forth in the Notice.

1.5 No Admission. TreeWorks denies the material factual and legal allegations contained in the Notice and maintains that, to the best of its knowledge, all products that are or have been sold

and distributed in California, including the Products, have been and are in compliance with all laws. Nothing in this Settlement Agreement shall be construed as an admission by TreeWorks of any fact, finding, issue of law, or violation of law; nor shall compliance with this Settlement Agreement constitute or be construed as an admission by TreeWorks of any fact, finding, conclusion, issue of law or violation of law, such being specifically denied by TreeWorks. However, this § 1.5 shall not diminish or otherwise affect the obligations, responsibilities and duties under this Settlement Agreement. Notwithstanding the allegations in the Notice, TreeWorks maintains that it has not knowingly manufactured, or caused to be manufactured, the Products for sale, import or distribution in California in violation of Proposition 65.

1.6 Effective Date. For purposes of this Settlement Agreement, the term “Effective Date” shall mean the date this Agreement is last executed by the Parties.

2. INJUNCTIVE RELIEF: WARNINGS


2.1 Reformulation of Products. As of the Effective Date, and continuing thereafter, Products that TreeWorks directly manufactures, imports, distributes, sells, or offers for sale in California shall either: (a) be Reformulated Products pursuant to § 2.2, below; or (b) be labeled with a clear and reasonable exposure warning pursuant to §§ 2.3 and 2.4, below. For purposes of this Settlement Agreement, a “Reformulated Product” is a Product that is in compliance with the standard set forth in § 2.2, below. The warning requirement set forth in §§ 2.3 and 2.4 shall not apply to any Reformulated Product.

2.2 Reformulation Standard. “Reformulated Products” shall mean Products that contain concentrations less than or equal to 0.1% (1,000 parts per million (ppm)) of DINP when analyzed pursuant to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency testing methodologies 3580A and 8270C or any other methodology utilized by federal or state government agencies for the purpose of determining the phthalate content in a solid substance.


2.3 Clear and Reasonable Warning. As of the Effective Date, and continuing thereafter, a compliant clear and reasonable exposure warning as set forth in this §§ 2.3 and 2.4 must be provided for all Products that TreeWorks manufacturers, imports, distributes, sells, or offers for sale in

California that is not a Reformulated Product. There shall be no obligation for TreeWorks to provide an exposure warning for Products that entered the stream of commerce prior to the Effective Date. The warning shall consist of the **Warning** or **Alternative Warning** described in §§ 2.3(a), (b), or (c) respectively:

(a) **Warning.** The “Warning” may consist of the statement:

 **WARNING:** This product can expose you to chemicals including diisononyl phthalate (DINP), which are known to the State of California to cause cancer. For more information go to www.P65Warnings.ca.gov.

(b) **Alternative Warning:** TreeWorks may, but is not required to, use the alternative short-form warning as set forth in this § 2.3(b) (“**Alternative Warning**”) as follows:

 **WARNING:** Cancer - www.P65Warnings.ca.gov.

(c) TreeWorks may use any form of “safe harbor” warning set forth in Proposition 65 regulations that are adopted at the time it places a Product in the stream of commerce.

2.4 A **Warning** or **Alternative Warning** provided pursuant to § 2.3 must print the word “**WARNING:**” in all capital letters and in bold font, followed by a colon. The warning symbol to the left of the word “**WARNING:**” must be a black exclamation point in a yellow equilateral triangle with a black outline, except that if the sign or label for the Products does not use the color yellow, the symbol may be in black and white. The symbol must be in a size no smaller than the height of the word “**WARNING:**”. The warning shall be affixed to or printed on the Products’ packaging or labeling, or on a placard, shelf tag, sign or electronic device or automatic process, providing that the warning is displayed with such conspicuousness, as compared with other words, statements, or designs as to render it likely to be read and understood by an ordinary individual under customary conditions of purchase or use. The warning may be contained in the same section of the packaging, labeling, or instruction booklet that states other safety warnings, if any, concerning the use of the Product and shall be at least the same size as those other safety warnings.

If TreeWorks sells Products via an Internet website to customers located in California, the warning requirements of this section shall be satisfied if the foregoing warnings outlined in § 2.3(a), (b) or (c) appears either: (a) on the same web page on which a Product is displayed and/or described;

(b) on the same page as the price for the Product; or (c) on one or more web pages displayed to a purchaser prior to purchase during the checkout process. Alternatively, a symbol consisting of a black exclamation point in a yellow or white equilateral triangle may appear adjacent to or immediately following the display, description, price, or checkout listing of the Product, if the warning statement appears elsewhere on the same web page in a manner that clearly associates it with the product(s) to which the warning applies.

2.5 Compliance with Warning Regulations. The Parties agree that TreeWorks shall be deemed to be in compliance with this Settlement Agreement by either adhering to §§ 2.3 and 2.4 of this Settlement Agreement or by complying with warning requirements adopted by the State of California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment ("OEHHA") after the Effective Date.

3. PENALTIES PURSUANT TO HEALTH & SAFETY CODE § 25249.7(b)

In settlement of all the claims referred to in this Settlement Agreement, TreeWorks shall pay \$500.00 as a Civil Penalty in accordance with this Section. The Civil Penalty payment shall be allocated in accordance with California Health & Safety Code §§ 25249.12(c)(1) and (d), with 75% of the Penalty remitted to OEHHA and the remaining 25% of the Penalty remitted to Balabbo. The Civil Penalty payment(s) shall be delivered to the addresses identified in § 3.2, below. For all amounts due and owing that are not received within the payment times set forth below, TreeWorks shall pay a late civil penalty payment fee equal to \$100/day to be allocated in accordance with California Health & Safety Code § 25249.12(c)(1) and (d).

3.1 Civil Penalty. Within ten (10) days of the Effective Date, TreeWorks shall issue two (2) separate checks for the Civil Penalty payment to (a) "OEHHA" in the amount of \$375.00; and to (b) "Brodsky & Smith in Trust for Balabbo" in the amount of \$125.00. The Civil Penalty payment(s) shall be delivered to the addresses identified in § 3.2, below.

3.2 Payment Procedures.

(a) Issuance of Payments. Payments shall be delivered as follows:

(i) All payments owed to Balabbo, pursuant to § 3.1 shall be delivered to the following payment address:

Evan J. Smith, Esquire
Brodsky & Smith
Two Bala Plaza, Suite 805
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004

(ii) All payments owed to OEHHHA (EIN: 68-0284486), pursuant to § 3.1 shall be delivered directly to OEHHHA (Memo Line “Prop 65 Penalties”) at the following addresses:

For United States Postal Service Delivery:

Mike Gyurics
Fiscal Operations Branch Chief
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
P.O. Box 4010
Sacramento, CA 95812-4010

For Non-United States Postal Service Delivery:

Mike Gyurics
Fiscal Operations Branch Chief
Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

(b) Copy of Payments to OEHHHA. TreeWorks agrees to provide Balabbo’s counsel with a copy of the checks payable to OEHHHA, simultaneous with its penalty payments to Balabbo, to be delivered to the address provided in § 3.2(a)(i), as proof of payment to OEHHHA.

(c) Tax Documentation. TreeWorks agrees to provide a completed IRS 1099 for its payments to, and Balabbo agrees to provide IRS W-9 forms for, each of the following payees under this Settlement Agreement:

(i) “Precila Balabbo” whose address and tax identification number shall be provided within five (5) days after this Settlement Agreement is fully executed by the Parties;

(ii) “Brodsky & Smith” (EIN: 23-2971061) at the address provided in Section 3.2(a)(i); and

(iii) “Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment” 1001 I Street,
Sacramento, CA 95814.

4. REIMBURSEMENT OF FEES AND COSTS

The Parties acknowledge that Balabbo and her counsel offered to reach preliminary agreement on the material terms of this dispute before reaching terms on the amount of fees and costs to be reimbursed to them. The Parties thereafter reached an accord on the compensation due to Balabbo and her counsel under general contract principles and the private attorney general doctrine and principles codified at California Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5, for all work performed through the mutual execution of this agreement. Under these legal principles, TreeWorks shall reimburse Balabbo’s counsel for fees and costs incurred as a result of investigating and bringing this matter to TreeWorks’ attention, and negotiating a settlement in the public interest. Within ten (10) days of the Effective Date, TreeWorks shall issue a check payable to “Brodsky & Smith” in the amount of \$4,500.00 for delivery to the address identified in § 3.2(a)(i), above.

5. RELEASE OF ALL CLAIMS

5.1 Release of TreeWorks and Downstream Customers and Entities. This Settlement Agreement is a full, final and binding resolution between Balabbo, acting on her own behalf, and TreeWorks, of any violation of Proposition 65 that was or could have been asserted by Balabbo or on behalf of her past and current agents, representatives, attorneys, successors, and/or assigns (“Releasers”) for failure to provide warnings for alleged exposures to DINP from use of the Products, and Releasers hereby release any such claims against TreeWorks and its owner(s), parents, subsidiaries, affiliated entities, shareholders, marketplaces, directors, officers, agents, employees, attorneys, successors and assignees, and each entity to whom TreeWorks directly or indirectly imports, distributes or sells the Products, including but not limited to, downstream distributors, wholesalers, customers, retailers, including but not limited to Sam Ash Music Corporation, and its respective subsidiaries, affiliates and parents, franchisees, cooperative members and licensees (collectively, the “Releasees”), from all claims for violations of Proposition 65 through the Effective Date based on exposure to DINP from use of the Products.

In further consideration of the promises and agreements herein contained, and for the payments to be made pursuant to §§ 3 and 4 above, Balabbo, on behalf of herself, her past and current agents, representatives, attorneys, successors and/or assignees, hereby covenants not to sue and waives any right to institute, participate in, directly or indirectly, any form of legal action and releases all claims that she may have, including without limitation, all actions and causes of action in law and in equity, all obligations, expenses (including without limitation all attorneys' fees, expert fees, and investigation fees, and costs), damages, losses, liabilities and demands against any of the Releasees of any nature, character, or kind, whether known or unknown, suspected or unsuspected, limited to and arising out of the alleged or actual exposure to the chemical DINP from use of the Products.

5.2 TreeWorks' Release of Balabbo. TreeWorks, on behalf of itself, its past and current agents, representatives, attorneys, successors and/or assignees, hereby waives any and all claims against Balabbo, her attorneys and other representatives, for any and all actions taken or statements made (or those that could have been taken or made) by Balabbo and/or her attorneys and other representatives, whether in the course of investigating claims or otherwise seeking to enforce Proposition 65 against it in this matter or with respect to the Products.

5.3 California Civil Code § 1542. It is possible that other claims not known to the Parties arising out of the facts alleged in the Notice and relating to the Products will develop or be discovered. Balabbo on behalf of herself only, on one hand, and TreeWorks, on the other hand, acknowledge that this Agreement is expressly intended to cover and include all such claims up through the Effective Date, including all rights of action therefor. The Parties acknowledge that the claims released in §§ 5.1 and 5.2, above, may include unknown claims, and nevertheless waive California Civil Code § 1542 as to any such unknown claims. California Civil Code § 1542 reads as follows:

A GENERAL RELEASE DOES NOT EXTEND TO CLAIMS THAT THE CREDITOR OR RELEASING PARTY DOES NOT KNOW OR SUSPECT TO EXIST IN HIS OR HER FAVOR AT THE TIME OF EXECUTING THE RELEASE AND THAT, IF KNOWN BY HIM OR HER, WOULD HAVE MATERIALLY AFFECTED HIS OR HER SETTLEMENT WITH THE DEBTOR OR RELEASED PARTY.

Balabbo and TreeWorks each acknowledge and understand the significance and consequences of this specific waiver of California Civil Code § 1542.

_____ BLM _____
Balabbo's Initials TreeWorks's Initials

5.4 Deemed Compliance with Proposition 65. The Parties agree that compliance by TreeWorks with this Settlement Agreement constitutes compliance with Proposition 65 with respect to exposure to DINP from use of the Products.

5.5. Public Benefit. It is TreeWorks' understanding that the commitments it has agreed to herein, and actions to be taken by TreeWorks under this Settlement Agreement, would confer a significant benefit to the general public, as set forth in Code of Civil Procedure § 1021.5 and Cal. Admin. Code tit. 11, § 3201. As such, it is the intent of TreeWorks that to the extent any other private party initiates an action alleging a violation of Proposition 65 with respect to TreeWorks' failure to provide a warning concerning exposure to DINP prior to use of the Products it has manufactured, imported, distributed, sold, or offered for sale in California, or will manufacture, import, distribute, sell, or offer for sale in California, such private party action would not confer a significant benefit on the general public as to those Products addressed in this Settlement Agreement, provided that TreeWorks is in material compliance with this Settlement Agreement.

6. SEVERABILITY

If, subsequent to the execution of this Settlement Agreement, any of the provisions of this Settlement Agreement are deemed by a court to be unenforceable, the validity of the enforceable provisions remaining shall not be adversely affected but only to the extent the deletion of the provision deemed unenforceable does not materially affect, or otherwise result in the effect of the Settlement Agreement being contrary to the intent of the Parties in entering into this Settlement Agreement.

7. GOVERNING LAW

The terms of this Settlement Agreement shall be governed by the law of the State of California and apply within the State of California. In the event that Proposition 65 is repealed or is otherwise rendered inapplicable or limited by reason of law generally, or as to the Products, TreeWorks shall provide written notice to Balabbo of any asserted change in the law, and shall have no further

obligations pursuant to this Settlement Agreement with respect to, and to the extent that, a Product is so affected.

8. NOTICES

Unless specified herein, all correspondence and notices required to be provided pursuant to this Settlement Agreement shall be in writing and personally delivered or sent by: (i) first-class (registered or certified mail) return receipt requested; or (ii) overnight or two-day courier on any party by the other party to the following addresses:

For TreeWorks:

Helen H. Yang
Squire Patton Boggs (US) LLP
555 South Flower Street, 31st Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90071

For Balabbo:

Evan J. Smith
Brodsky & Smith
Two Bala Plaza, Suite 805
Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004

Either party, from time to time, may specify in writing to the other party a change of address to which all notices and other communications shall be sent.

9. COUNTERPARTS: SIGNATURES

This Settlement Agreement may be executed in counterparts and by facsimile or .pdf signature, each of which shall be deemed an original, and all of which, when taken together, shall constitute one and the same document.

10. COMPLIANCE WITH HEALTH & SAFETY CODE § 25249.7(f)

Balabbo agrees to comply with the reporting requirements referenced in Health & Safety Code § 25249.7(f).

11. MODIFICATION AND WAIVER

This Settlement Agreement may be modified only by a written agreement of the Parties. Any waiver of this Settlement Agreement, or of any of the terms and conditions to this Settlement Agreement, may be accomplished only by a written instrument signed by all Parties.

12. ENTIRE AGREEMENT

This Settlement Agreement contains the sole and entire agreement of the Parties regarding the subject matter of this Settlement Agreement, and any and all prior negotiations and understandings related hereto shall be deemed to have been merged within it. No representations or terms of agreement other than those contained herein exist or have been made by any Party with respect to the other Party or the subject matter hereof.

13. ADVICE OF COUNSEL

The Parties to this Settlement Agreement acknowledge that they have consulted with and received the advice of an attorney of their own choice who is admitted to practice law in the State of California, and that they execute this Settlement Agreement relying upon the advice of counsel and their own, independent investigation of the facts and analysis of the terms of this Settlement Agreement. Each Party represents that she, he or it has read this Agreement, fully understands its contents, and enters into this Agreement voluntarily and of their own free will.

14. COSTS OF SUIT/ATTORNEYS' FEES

As part of this settlement and consistent with § 4 herein, TreeWorks is paying all Balabbo's attorneys' fees in connection with her dispute. Each Party hereto otherwise agrees to pay its own costs and attorneys' fees in connection with this Settlement Agreement.

15. BINDING

This Settlement Agreement shall be binding on and inure to the benefit of each Party hereto and, to the extent applicable, such party's respective present or former owner(s), directors, officers, consultants, affiliated entities or corporations, parents, subsidiaries, divisions, franchisees, partners, joint venturers, agents, shareholders, investors, creditors, insurers, attorneys, employees, representatives, heirs, successors, licensees, customers, and assigns.

16. AUTHORIZATION


The undersigned are authorized to execute this Settlement Agreement and have read, understood and agree to all of the terms and conditions contained of this Settlement Agreement.

AGREED TO:

AGREED TO:

Date: 07/29/2022

Date: July 26, 2022

By: 
Precila Balabbo

By: Bernist L. McMichen
Bernist L. McMichen, on behalf of TreeWorks