



For Immediate Release: 27 June 2017

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New Study Shows Many Kenyan Paints Still Contain High Lead Levels

Nairobi, Kenya (27 June 2017). More than 70 percent of the paint brands in a new study analyzing lead in solvent-based paints for home use in Kenya sold one or more paint that contained dangerously high total lead levels greater than 10,000 ppm. One yellow paint advertised as “lead free” contained lead levels as high as 16 percent of the paint, almost 1,800 times the allowed limit of 0.009 percent (90 ppm) established in many countries for lead in paint. This is also the maximum allowed level in two paint standards adopted by the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS), expected to be gazetted this year. These and other concerning findings are part of a report released today by the Centre for Environment Justice and Development (CEJAD) and IPEN.

“Lead exposure affects children even at low levels, and its health impacts are generally irreversible and lifelong,” said Griffins Ochieng, Executive Director, CEJAD. “If we do not act now, we are placing our children’s intellectual development at risk, thereby minimizing our country’s future intellectual capacity even though safe and effective substitutes are already in use and widely available in Kenya. We must eliminate this perilous source of lead exposure to young children at once.”

“Use of lead in paint is a major source of childhood lead exposure” said Dr. Sara Brosché, Global Lead Paint Elimination Project Manager, IPEN. “Children six years of age and under are the most vulnerable, typically ingesting lead-contaminated dust through normal hand-to-mouth behavior while their bodies absorb up to five times as much of ingested lead than adults. We urge governments to enact regulations that will prohibit the use of lead in paint and paint manufacturers to act immediately to remove leaded ingredients from their paint production.”

From July to September 2016, CEJAD purchased a total of 51 cans of solvent-based paint intended for home use representing 21 brands and produced by 19 manufacturers from various stores in Nairobi, Kenya. Samples from these paints were analyzed by an accredited laboratory in the USA for total lead content.

Key findings from the report, *Lead in Solvent-Based Paints for Home Use in Kenya*, include:

- A majority (69 percent) of the solvent-based paints contained lead concentrations above 90 ppm. Moreover, a third of the paints contained dangerously high lead concentrations above 10,000 ppm.
- The highest lead concentration detected was 160,000 ppm in a paint advertised as “lead free,”
- 71 percent of the brands in the study sold at least one paint with dangerously high lead concentrations above 10,000 ppm.
- Yellow paints were the most hazardous with a 76 percent containing lead concentrations greater than 10,000 ppm, and almost a third of the red paints contained such high lead concentrations.

- Most paint can labels did not carry meaningful information about lead content or the hazards of lead paint and three paints from one brand were found to falsely advertising themselves as “lead free”
- These results are similar to a previous paint study conducted in 2012, showing the need for immediate action to eliminate lead paint from Kenya.

The Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) has developed and adopted two Standards on the determination of total lead content in paints, varnishes and related products (KS 2661-1:2016 and KS 2661-2:2016) aimed at controlling the manufacture and importation of lead paints. However, the standards are yet to be published in an official gazette

Most highly industrial countries adopted laws or regulations to control the lead content of decorative paints—the paints used on the interiors and exteriors of homes, schools, and other child-occupied facilities—beginning in the 1970s and 1980s. The strictest regulatory limit of 90 parts per million (ppm) total lead content is established in many countries, including Canada, India, Nepal, the Philippines, and the USA. Several other countries, including Brazil, Singapore, South Africa and Sri Lanka, have a 600-ppm total legal lead limit.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes lead paint as a major source of “lead-caused mental retardation,” a disease WHO identifies as one of the top ten diseases whose health burden among children was due to modifiable environmental factors. WHO further states that “there is no known level of lead exposure that is considered safe.”¹

Key recommendations made in the report include:

- **Government:** For the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) to fast track the gazettelement of the two Standards on the determination of total lead content in paints, varnishes and related products.
- **Industry:** Stop the use of lead-based pigments, driers, and substances in paint formulations, and shift to non-hazardous alternatives.
- **Consumers:** Purchase and use paints with no added lead in places frequently used by children such as homes, schools, day care centers, parks and playgrounds, and demand full disclosure of a paint product’s content.

About IPEN

IPEN is a global non-government organization (NGO) with participating organizations in more than 100 countries working for a toxics free future. It has conducted studies of lead in paint in more than 50 countries and is a member of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint Advisory Group. For information, visit www.ipen.org.

About CEJAD

Centre for Environment Justice and Development (CEJAD) is a not-for-profit Non-Governmental Organization promoting rural development and environmental justice in Kenya, through sound chemicals management and sustainable use of natural resources by: advocating and lobbying for pro-sustainability policy and legal frameworks; educating and advising the public on available technologies and practices that improve human and environmental health; and conducting and/or participating in research that generate knowledge for influencing sound policies and actions. For information, visit www.cejadkenya.org.

¹ World Health Organization. Lead poisoning and health. 2015; Available from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs379/en/>.