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High Lead Levels Found in More than a Third of Solvent-Based Paints Sold in Zambia

(Lead Exposure Can Cause Permanent Brain Damage in Children)

21 October 2017, Livingstone. Thirty-six percent of paints analyzed in a new study on total lead in solvent-based decorative paints sold in Zambia contained high lead levels, and nine out of 39 paints from 13 brands analyzed contained exceedingly high lead levels. All 39 paint can labels failed to carry any consumer information about lead content. These findings are part of a new report released today by the Children's Environmental Health Foundation (CEHF) and [IPEN](#).

“The health impacts of lead exposure on young children’s brains are lifelong, irreversible and untreatable,” said Michael Musenga of CEHF. “We are limiting our children and our nation’s future intellectual development, even though safe and effective alternatives are already in use and widely available. We must reduce this critical source of lead exposure to young children.”

“Continued use of lead paint is a primary source of childhood lead exposure,” said Dr. Sara Brosché, IPEN’s Global Lead Paint Elimination Campaign Manager.

“Children – especially those under 6 years of age – ingest or inhale lead through exposure to dust or soil contaminated with lead-based paint and normal hand-to-mouth behavior or when they chew on toys, household furniture or other articles painted with lead paint. Governments should set mandatory limits on lead paint, but paint companies should not wait for regulation; they can and should act now.”

CEHF released ***Lead in Solvent-Based Paints for Home Use in Zambia*** report as part of the worldwide activities during the [International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week of Action \(ILPPWA\)](#), October 22 -28, 2017. The Week of Action is co-led by [UN Environment](#) and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#). As a part of the Week of Action, IPEN also released ***Lead in Solvent-Based Paint for Home Use Global Report***, a comprehensive review of lead in paint sold around the world, which finds that a quarter of all paints analyzed in 50 out of the 55 countries studied in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe contain lead levels dangerous to children.

In a statement prepared for this year's ILPPWA, Dr. Maria Neira Director of the Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health for the World Health Organization (WHO) said, "Lead paint is a serious threat to the long term health of our children. Yet lead paint is still on sale in many countries and is used to decorate homes and schools. WHO calls on all countries to phase out lead paint by 2020 to protect the health of this and future generations."

From September, 2016 to March, 2017, CEHF purchased a total of 39 cans of solvent-based, enamel decorative paints from various stores in Lusaka, Livingstone and Choma. The paints represented 13 different brands produced by seven manufacturers. 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 Zambia*** include:

---Fourteen out of 39 paints or 36 percent) of the solvent-based paints analyzed contained total lead concentrations above 90 parts per million (ppm); seven paints (18 percent) contained dangerously high lead concentrations above 10,000 ppm.

---Nine out of 13 paint brands produced at least one paint with a total lead concentration above 90 ppm.

---The majority of brightly colored paints (14 out of 39 or 36 percent) contained lead concentrations greater than 90 ppm. Yellow paints were the most hazardous with four out of ten yellow paints (40 percent) containing total lead concentrations greater than 10,000 ppm.

---The highest lead concentration detected was 120,000 ppm in an orange paint sold in Zambia.

---None of the paints provided information about lead on their labels and most paints carried little information about ingredients.

Zambia has no legally binding regulations to control lead in paint.

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 standard, 90 ppm total lead content in decorative paint, is common in many countries, including the Philippines, Nepal, India, Cameroon, and the United States of America. Several other countries, including Singapore and Sri Lanka, have a 600ppm total lead standard.

The WHO calls lead paint “a major flashpoint” for children’s potential lead poisoning and says that “since the phase-out of leaded petrol, lead paint is one of the largest sources of exposure to lead in children.” Children are exposed to lead, when painted surfaces deteriorate over time and contaminate household dust and soils. Children, ages 0-6, engaging in normal hand-to-mouth behaviors are most at risk of damage to their intelligence and mental development from exposure to lead dust and soil.

Lead levels in this study are consistent with the results of a similar paint study conducted by CEHF and the University of Zambia (UNZA) in October 2015. In that study, forty-one solvent-based paints from different manufacturers were found to

contain lead levels above 90 ppm. Similarly, a very high percentage of the paints in the former study (37 percent) contained more than 10,000 ppm lead compared to 18 percent in the current study. This indicates that in Zambia, levels of lead in solvent-based paints among some local manufacturers are still above 90ppm.

Key recommendations made in the report include:

Government: The Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) should immediately draft legislation that will ban the manufacture, import, export, distribution, sale and use of paints that contain total lead concentrations exceeding 90 ppm, the most restrictive standard in the world. They should also require paint companies to display sufficient information indicating harmful contents on paint can labels such as solvents and provide warning on possible lead dust hazards when disturbing paint surfaces.

Paint Industry: Paint companies that still produce lead paints should expeditiously stop the use of lead paint ingredients in paint formulations. Paint companies that have shifted to non-lead paint production should get their products certified through independent, third party verification procedures to increase the customer's ability to choose paints with no added lead.

Consumers: Paint consumers should demand paints with no added lead from paint manufacturers and retailers, as well as full disclosure of a paint product's content. Household and institutional consumers should ask for, consciously buy, and apply only paints with no added lead in places frequently used by children such as homes, schools, day care centers, parks and playgrounds.

The paint study was undertaken as part of IPEN's Global Lead Paint Elimination Project.

CEHF, a non-profit making organization founded in 2011, supports sustainable environment and aims to see the standards of the environment, where the Zambian child and underprivileged families live, uplifted. CEHF champions the

protection of children and other vulnerable populations at risk from all forms of environmental health hazards and chemical threats that inhibit the development potential of children through professional execution of its plans, programs and projects.

IPEN is an international NGO network comprised of over 500 organizations in 116 countries that work to reduce and eliminate hazardous, toxic substances internationally and within their own countries. (www.ipen.org)

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