

Push to Phase-out Life Threatening Leaded Paints in Kenya

Nairobi, 28 October 2015 - Paints that contain lead pose a great risk of lead poisoning, especially for children and pregnant women.

When lead paint used in homes, schools and playgrounds deteriorates over time, children may inhale or ingest lead through household dust, paint chips or contaminated soil.

Childhood lead poisoning can have lifelong health impacts, including reduced IQs, learning disabilities, hypertension, seizure, anaemia, disorders in coordination, visual, spatial and language skills.

For instance, based on a recent study, estimated reduced cognitive potentials (loss of IQ points) due to preventable childhood lead exposure equal to 98.2 million points in Africa. Other studies have concluded that economic losses attributable to childhood lead exposure in all low and middle income countries were estimated at \$ 977 billion per year. In Africa, the economic losses were estimated at \$ 134.7 billion (4.03% of total GDP).

According to a 2014 study by the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI), there are more than 30 paint manufacturing companies actively operating in Kenya. The study surveyed 15 of these companies to assess their use of lead additives. The findings revealed that only 2 have transitioned to “no added lead” for household paint

The World Health Organization (WHO), which considers lead as one of the **“ten chemicals of major public health concern,”** has stated that there is no safe level of exposure to lead. The imperative, therefore, is to push for total elimination of lead in paint.

Kenya paint manufacturers, policy makers and public interest civil society organizations are meeting this Friday in Nairobi for a dialogue on eliminating lead in paints in Kenya.

Convened by the Centre for Environment Justice and Development (CEJAD) - an environmental NGO, in partnership with the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), a global civil society network pursuing safe chemicals policies and practices the meeting aims to fast-track Kenya's efforts to achieve the global goal of eliminating lead paint by 2020 as affirmed by the recently held International Conference on Chemicals Management in Geneva, Switzerland.

Participants at the meeting will include representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Ministry of Health, National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI) and the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS). Others are representatives of leading paint manufacturers Crown Paints Kenya Limited, Basco Products Kenya among others as well as the Kenya Association of Manufacturers.

"Paint manufacturers are leading the effort to eliminate lead in paint both as responsible citizenry and prudent business strategy. We are also glad that key policy makers and other strategic stakeholders are involved in this dialogue," said Mr. Griffins Ochieng, CEJAD Programmes Coordinator.

"CEJAD is pressing for local lead in paint elimination measures especially during the International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week of Action (25-31 October). It's essential for our society to respond to this global challenge and make the phase out of lead paint a top public health priority. We must act with urgency as the health of our children can be permanently and irreversibly damaged even at very low exposures to lead," added Mr. Ochieng.

A 2012 analysis of 31 paint samples by iLima - a Kenyan NGO working

on safe management of chemicals and waste and IPEN, revealed that the average lead concentration in paints in Kenya was 14,900 parts per million (ppm) way above US established 90 ppm for lead in decorative paints.

Of the 31 samples of enamel house paints purchased in Kenya and tested in US, 27 had lead content greater than 90 ppm lead and would not be permitted for sale or use in the United States. Twenty five of these had lead content greater than 600 ppm and would not be permitted for sale or use in most highly industrial countries. Eight had lead content greater than 10,000 ppm lead.

“Safe, cost-effective alternatives to lead in paint have been in use for more than 40 years in the United States, the European Union and other high income countries. There is no good reason that lead paint continues to be sold in the developing parts of the world including Kenya,” said Dr. Sara Brosché, International Lead Paint Elimination Project Manager at [IPEN](#).

CEJAD is promoting a three-tier approach to promote lead free paints in Kenya namely:

- A command and control approach that encourages the formulation a legal framework that would regulate the importation, production, formulation and marketing of lead paints in the country;
- Formulation of a policy that promotes the production and marketing of lead free paints using market based instruments;
- Public engagement through awareness raising and education to educate citizens on the dangers of leaded paints and inform them of available options.

Notes to Editors

- Childhood lead exposure is estimated to contribute to about 600,000 new cases of children developing intellectual disabilities every year.
- Paints and pigments still represent 10 - 12% of total lead use,

representing as much as a million tons of lead each year.

- Lead exposure is estimated to account for 143, 000 deaths per year with the highest burden in developing regions.
- Ninety-nine percent of children affected by high exposure to lead live in low- and middle-income countries.
- Health issues directly related to childhood exposure to lead in paint translate to over \$977 billion in economic losses in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.