



Centre de Recherche et d'Éducation pour le Développement
Research and Education Centre for Development

B.P : 2970 Yaoundé / Tel: +237 242 8250 94 / +2376 77202271

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Email : crepdcentre@yahoo.com; website : www.crepdcameroun.org

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A New Study confirms High Lead Levels in Paints marketed in Cameroon
Cameroonians are not protected against health effects of exposure to lead from lead paints

(Yaoundé, 6 July 2017). A new study on lead in solvent-based paints marketed for home use in Cameroon released today by Centre de Recherche et d'Éducation pour le Développement (CREPD) finds that **15 percent** of the paints analyzed still have dangerously high total lead levels above 10,000 parts per million (ppm), and that this high percentage is mostly due to **imported paint brands**. Little has changed since a similar study in 2015 that showed that **17 percent** of the paints contained equally high lead levels. Moreover, even when there are paint brands offering paints with lower levels of lead, consumers have no way of knowing it because only 6 of the 65 paint cans analyzed in the study carried information about lead content on the label. This study released is one of the four studies that have been released in four different African countries on lead in paint within the framework of the Lead Paint Elimination Project in Africa.

"The health impacts of lead exposure on young children's brains are lifelong, irreversible and untreatable," said **Dr. Gilbert KUEPOUO**, Executive Director of CREPD. "We must reduce this avoidable source of lead exposure to young children. The Highest Authority of the republic, the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon urged in 2016 the relevant ministries to take appropriate measures to protect the population and the nation from lead paints. The Emergency national regulation limiting lead concentration to 90 ppm in all paints and products coated with paint manufactured, imported, exported, sold and used must be urgently enacted to ensure the health and future potential of our children."

"If you don't want your children to have developmental problems, learning disabilities or a lowered IQ, and do not intend to risk forthcoming subsequent health and economic burden, ensure that your family is not exposed to lead paint," said **Prof. Francisca Monebenimp**, Pediatrician, Department of Public Health at the Faculty of Medical and Biomedical Sciences, UYI and lead author of a Scientific paper on lead levels in Children in Yaoundé (In Press). "The Government must act quickly to protect the health of present and future generations from lead paint hazards, said **Mr. Elhadji Kamsouloum Hachimi**, Focal Point of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint at the Ministry of Public Health.



“Elimination of lead paint in Cameroon is a key contribution to the implementation of the Strategic Approach to International Chemical Management (SAICM) in the country. If lead poisoning is not appropriately addressed now, this will prevent our nation to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals”, said **Mr. Enoh Peter AYUK**, SAICM National Focal Point at the Ministry of Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development.

From September 2016 to January 2017, CREPD purchased a total of 65 cans of solvent-based, enamel decorative paints from stores in Douala and Yaoundé. The paints were from 23 brands, both locally manufactured and imported. All paints were analyzed by an accredited laboratory in the United States of America (USA) for their total lead content based on the dry weight of the paint. Key findings include:

- 43 percent of the paints contained high levels of lead above 90 parts per million (ppm), the limit in the draft national regulation and a limit endorsed by more than 20 African governments from 2015 to 2016.
- The highest lead concentration detected on paint was 220,000 ppm; this is nearly 2,500 times the 90 ppm limit.
- Paints with yellow, red, orange and green colors most frequently contained dangerously high levels of lead above 10,000 ppm.
- Only nine percent of all the paint cans carried labels with information on the lead content of paint.

The World Health Organization (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 aged 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.

CREPD began studying the lead content of paints and raising awareness of the hazards of lead paint in 2011, when its first paint analysis showed that **67 percent** of paint analyzed, even from major manufacturers, contained lead above 90 ppm. Subsequent studies in 2013 and 2015 showed that **52 percent** and **47 percent** of paints analyzed had high lead contents respectively. The decreasing trend is mostly due to the voluntary efforts by the major local manufacturers and some SMEs. Such a serious health and environmental issue cannot be solved by industry voluntary action only. 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. Cameroon does not currently have a specific policy or regulation for the content of lead in enamel decorative paints.

Key recommendations made in the report include:



Government. The Government of Cameroon should immediately finalize and enact the regulation that has been under consideration in the Office of the Prime Minister for more than one and a half years. The Government should make sure that the final regulation 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. The regulation should also require paint companies to display sufficient information indicating harmful content on paint can labels such as solvents, product's batch number and provide a warning on possible lead dust hazards when disturbing painted surfaces.

Paint Industry. Paint companies that still produce lead paints should expeditiously stop the use of leaded paint ingredients in paint formulations. Paint companies should indicate the lead content of their products and provide warnings on lead dust hazards on paint can labels. Retailers should also demand labeled products from paint companies. 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.

Paint importers. Paint importers or foreign paint brands holders shall request properly labeled paint cans from their suppliers indicating the lead content of their products and warning notifications of lead and lead dust hazards.

Individual, Household and Institutional 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.

Organizations and Professional Groups. Public health groups, school communities, consumer organizations and other concerned entities should support the elimination of lead paint, and conduct activities to inform and protect children from lead exposure through lead paint, lead in dust and soil, and other sources of lead.

All Stakeholders including media. All stakeholders should come together and unite in promoting a strong policy that will eliminate lead paint in Cameroon and ensure efficient enforcement mechanisms.

The paint study released today was conducted as a part the African Lead Paint Elimination Project, which works with government, the paint industry and the public to raise awareness of the dangers associated with high lead levels in paint. The African Lead Paint Elimination Project is being carried out in four countries (Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Tanzania) with funding from the Global Environment Facility. The UN Environment is the Implementing Agency and IPEN is the Executing Agency for this project. While this study was undertaken with the assistance of the Global Environment Facility and UN Environment, responsibility for the content lies entirely with IPEN and CREPD. The GEF and UN Environment do not necessarily share the expressed views and interpretations.



IPEN is a network of 500 NGOs in more than 100 countries working for a toxics free future and is a member of the Advisory Group for the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, hosted by UN Environment and WHO. The Cameroon NGO, CREPD, is responsible for Lead Paint Elimination Project activities in Cameroon.

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For More information, please contact:

Dr. Gilbert KUEPOUO

Executive Director/Coordinator of CREPD

Telephone(s): 242 825094 or 677202271

Email: kuepouo@yahoo.com

Skype: gilbert.kuepouo1

