

## PRESS RELEASE



### Dangerous Lead Levels in Paints

19<sup>th</sup> November, 2013, New Delhi, Most paint companies in India sell household paint that contains unsafe levels of lead according to a new study by Toxics Link titled, "Lead in India's Enamel Household Paints" released today. Dangerous levels of lead have been found in samples of household decorative paints collected from Indian markets, manufactured by Small and Medium sized businesses (SMEs). The results suggest that paint already used in children's environments constitute a route of exposure of lead to the young and most vulnerable population. The status of lead uses in micro, small and medium enterprises is so far unknown, but this study indicates that the small and medium paint manufacturers are adding excessive amounts of lead in their decorative paints.

The paint study was done in coordination with the IPEN Asian Lead Paint Elimination Project, which is being implemented in seven different countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand) with a total European Union (EU) funding of EUR 1.4 million (INR 118 million) over a period of three years. Toxics Link is implementing the project in India.

Major paint manufacturer consistently added lead in their decorative paint until 2007, with the exception of one paint manufacturer who claimed to produce paints without added lead from early stages. Now all major paint manufacturers are slowly phasing out lead from their decorative paints. This phase out of lead in paint by India's market leaders is an indicator of the impact of the lead in paint campaign started by Toxics Link in India in 2006. Toxics Link conducted the first research on this issue in 2007, where 1,40,000 ppm of lead was detected as the highest amount in Indian decorative paint. A follow up study in 2009 detected 49,600 ppm as the highest level of lead and a third study in 2011 detected 34,700 ppm of lead as the highest concentration.

"Exposure to even small amounts of lead can reduce a child's intelligence and school performance and can also cause increased violent behavior, so high levels of lead in paint are a cause for serious concern not only for families, but the country as a whole. This damage is lifelong and irreversible," said Ravi Agarwal, Director Toxics Link.

Painted surfaces deteriorate with time or when disturbed, and lead from the paint then contaminates household dust and soils surrounding the home. Children ingest lead from dusts and soils during normal hand to mouth behavior. Damage to children's intelligence and mental development occurs, even when there are no obvious or clinical signs of lead poisoning. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) there is no safe level of lead exposure.

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Dr. Nata Menabde, WHO Representative to India welcomed the release of the report, titled, Lead in India's Enamel Household Paints. "Preventing children, workers and women in reproductive age from exposure to lead, in all its forms, is imperative for their healthy future.

The addition of lead compounds to decorative paints poses unacceptable risks and this practice should be stopped as urgently as possible", she said. "There is a need to call on countries to strengthen national actions through inter-sectoral collaboration and raising public awareness to eliminate lead paint", she further added.

A total of 250 samples of new enamel decorative paint from 147 brands (major and small paint manufacturers sold in India), were purchased and analyzed for lead content. The enamel paints sampled are primarily for home use. The study found that overall paint produced by SMEs has very high lead concentration in their paint brands says Satish Sinha, Associate Director Toxics Link.

90% of the paints included in the study contained lead concentrations above 90 parts per million (ppm, dry weight of the sample), which is the proposed draft Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standards for enamel interior paints, and it is also considered an internationally acceptable level of lead. The report found that claims of no added lead by five major paint manufacturers (Asian Paint, Kansai Nerolac, Berger Paints, ICI /Akzo Nobel and Shalimar) to be satisfactory, since lead levels in samples from 10 paints manufactured by these companies ranged from 8 to 32 ppm.

The average concentration of all analyzed paints was found to be 22,800 ppm. Very high lead concentrations above 10,000 ppm were found in 111 of the 250 paints analyzed; 96 of the paints contained concentrations between 10,000 and 600 ppm, and 17 of the paints contained concentrations between 600 and 90 ppm. None of these paints would qualify for sale on the international market. The other 26 paints contained low (below 90 ppm) lead concentrations. The highest concentration detected was 1, 60,000 ppm.

The highest concentration was observed in yellow colored paints. Lead concentration above 90 ppm was detected in 102 (94%) out of 109 yellow paints, 105 (87%) out of 121 white paints, 8 (80%) of 10 paints with dark colors (black, brown and grey) and 9 (90%) of 10 of brightly colored paints (green, blue and red).

Recommendations from Toxics Link include: Government should create and enforce national standards for lead in paint and monitor stricter compliance. The European Union restricts the sale and use of house paints, but in India there is no regulation. Consumers should ask for and purchase lead safe paint from the market. Paint manufactures, vendors, large purchases should produce paint without using lead compounds, include a uniform logo (lead-safe paint) on products, as well as guidelines for use, including home decorative or industrial and commercial uses. Also, a mandatory public procurement process must require lead safe paint.

In addition, scientific, environmental and health associations should hold more public awareness Programmes or campaigns on lead in paint. Toxics Link also recommends blood lead level test when appropriate along with treatment and cautions to reduce and avoid lead exposure.

The samples of oil-based (enamel) house paints were purchased from stores in and around Delhi, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, Gujarat Haryana between 2012 and 2013 and sent to Certottica laboratory in Italy. (Certottica is accredited both by ACCREDIA – the Italian Accreditation System; the Italian National Accreditation Body appointed by the state, as well as by the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) under the U.S. EPA Environmental Lead Laboratory Accreditation Program and meets all international program requirements.)

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About Toxics Link ([www.toxicslink.org](http://www.toxicslink.org))

Toxics Link is an environmental research and advocacy organization set up in 1996 by The Just Environment Charitable Trust. It lays a special emphasis on reaching out to numerous grassroots groups; community based organizations and the public at large through its empirical study-based information on environmental issues. Toxics Link works closely with all other stakeholders working on similar issues and has played a seminal role in facilitating the development of several common platforms for them on the national, regional as well as international levels. Toxics Link works in the area of Community and Waste, Toxics-free Health Care, Clean Industry, Chemicals & Health and Information & Communication. We work from New Delhi and have our nodal offices in Kolkata in West Bengal.

About IPEN Asian Lead Elimination Project ([www.ipen.org](http://www.ipen.org))

IPEN is an international NGO network of health and environmental organizations from all regions of the world in which Toxics Link participates. IPEN is a leading global organization working to establish and implement safe chemicals policies and practices to protect human health and the environment.

The project is working in seven Asian countries to eliminate lead in paint and raise widespread awareness among business entrepreneurs and consumers about the adverse human health impacts of lead-based decorative paints, particularly on the health of children under six years old. The seven Asian countries are Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The project includes periodical analyses of lead concentrations in paints; information and support to small- and medium-sized paint manufacturers, dealers, retailers to help them to shift from lead-based to lead-free paints; third party certification and labeling that includes information on lead; help to government institutions to enact the standard for lead in paints; preparation and dissemination of awareness materials and mass awareness raising programs about lead paint and their impact especially on children health and environment etc.

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