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Consumers Association of Penang
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Press Statement

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CAP urges standards for lead in paints

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recognised 23–29 October 2022, as International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week to raise awareness and promote actions to address the health impacts of lead exposure. In conjunction with this occasion, the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the Malaysian government to expedite regulatory measures that would eliminate lead in paint.

This year CAP will join the **Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint** (referred hereto as the Alliance), a joint program of WHO and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) for **International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week** (ILPPW) emphasising the urgent need to protect children's health through action to eliminate the use of leaded paint.

CAP is a member of IPEN (International Pollutants Elimination Network), a global coalition of over 600 public interest organisations in over 125 countries working to eliminate toxic substances. IPEN is a founding member of the Alliance and a member of its Advisory Board. This year's ILPPW events will mark the tenth anniversary of the annual week-long effort to raise the global profile of ongoing lead poisoning threats, including from lead paint which continues to be used in Malaysia and the majority of countries around the world.

It is 30 years since CAP made calls to the government to come out with standards for lead in paints. Till today we still find lead in our paints.

There have been recent efforts by the Department of Standards Malaysia to include specifications in their standards for certain types of paints that the ingredients used in the paint formulation shall not contain lead. However, these standards are voluntary and do not cover the whole range of paints in the market.

There were some initiatives taken by the Ministry of **Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs** at the end of 2020 to come out with mandatory standards for lead in paints. However, till today there is no news of the progress.

Since 2009, IPEN member groups have conducted more than 100 studies on more than 4,000 paints from 59 countries, including Malaysia.

In our latest test, 20 out of 28 samples of enamel decorative paints tested were found to contain lead. Out of which 2 were found to contain more than 10,000 ppm (parts per million) of lead.

CAP's study on lead in paint in the past revealed the following:

- In 1992, we found 7 out of 9 enamel paints tested to contain lead above 600 ppm. The highest amount of lead in that study was 11,700 ppm.
- In 2016, we tested another 39 samples of enamel decorative paint. 16 of the samples contained a total lead concentration above 600 ppm. Out of which 12 samples contained dangerously high concentrations of lead above 10,000 ppm. The highest lead concentration detected was 150,000 ppm.

- In 2019, CAP's analysis revealed 11 out of 17 playground equipment had dangerously high lead levels above 10,000 ppm.
- In 2020, we tested spray paints. 12 out of 48 samples were found to contain lead, out of which 2 samples had lead greater than 10,000 ppm.

Decades of evidence have shown that there is no safe level of exposure to lead. Lead is a potent poison that affects multiple body systems and is particularly harmful to young children. Even at low doses, lead can affect children's brain development, resulting in reduced IQ, behavioural changes such as reduced attention span and increased antisocial behaviour, and reduced educational attainment. Lead exposure can also damage the kidneys, reproductive organs, and the immune system and result in anaemia and hypertension. The neurological and behavioural effects of lead are typically irreversible.

Paints contain high levels of lead when the paint manufacturer intentionally adds one or more leaded compounds to the paint for some purpose. A paint product may also contain some amount of lead when paint ingredients contaminated with lead are used, or when there is cross-contamination from other product lines in the same factory. Leaded paint is a continuing source of exposure in many countries.

In view of the dangers of lead and taking into consideration that lead paint elimination is gaining momentum globally, CAP calls on the Malaysian government to promulgate and enforce laws to eliminate lead in paint.

Malaysia should not be complacent. As lead has a strong and detrimental impact on children, immediate action needs to be taken to safeguard our future generation.

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