



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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CAP: Promulgate law to eliminate lead in paints

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recognised 22–28 October 2023, as International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (ILPPW) to raise awareness and promote actions to address the health impacts of lead exposure. The theme for 2023 - End Childhood Lead Poisoning

In conjunction with this occasion, the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the Malaysian government to promulgate a law that would eliminate lead in 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.

Lead is a well-recognised toxicant that has wide-ranging health impacts, in particular affecting the neurological, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and hematological systems.

Young children are particularly vulnerable as they have unique pathways that can lead to higher exposures than adults. In addition, lead can cause irreversible damage to the developing brain which can last for the rest of the child's life, such as reduced intellectual ability.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) latest data estimates that more than 2 million deaths globally were attributed to chemical exposures in 2019. Lead exposure was attributed to nearly half of these deaths. Additionally, lead exposure was estimated to account for 21.7 million years lost to disability (disability-adjusted life years, or DALYs) worldwide in 2019, including 30% of the global burden of idiopathic intellectual disability, 4.6% of the global burden of cardiovascular disease and 3.0% of the global burden of chronic kidney diseases.

Despite wide recognition of the harmful effects of lead and actions in many countries, exposure to lead, particularly during childhood, remains a key concern to healthcare providers and public health officials worldwide.

It has been more than 30 years since CAP made calls to the government to come out with standards for lead in paints. Till today we still find high levels of lead in some 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.

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 (parts per million). 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 equipments 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.
- In 2022, we tested 28 samples of enamel decorative paints, out of which 20 samples were found to contain lead. Two samples were found to contain more than 10,000 ppm of lead.

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.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
Consumers Association of Penang (CAP)