

US company identified as manufacture of lead paint in Africa

March 19 2013

House paint containing dangerous concentrations of lead is being sold in Cameroon by an American company – and the company is refusing to remove the paint from store shelves.

"There is an immediate need for regulations to restrict the lead content of [paint](#) in [Cameroon](#) to protect [public health](#)," said Perry Gottesfeld, Executive Director of Occupational Knowledge International (OK International) and co-author of a new research study about this lead hazard.

"The levels of lead are extraordinarily high, and these products have been banned in the U.S. for more than 30 years," Gottesfeld said.

The study, in the May issue of the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene* revealed lead concentrations are as high as 50 percent by weight in household paint being sold by Cameroon's largest paint company, Seignerurie – a subsidiary of the U.S. Company PPG. This concentration is more than 5,000 times the allowable limit in the U.S.

Lead is added to paint because it is inexpensive way to add color, resist [corrosion](#), or to improve the drying.

The research was jointly conducted by OK International and the Research and Education Centre for Development (CREPD) and involved samples from dozens of stores. Results showed that two-thirds (66%) of

new paints in Cameroon made by more than ten companies had hazardous lead levels in excess of 90 parts per million (ppm). The researchers also found that none of the lead paints surveyed in stores had any hazard warnings while only 8% of the paints had labels identifying any of the ingredients. The new study is the first one which provides the names of paint companies and the lead concentrations for all 61 paints tested.

"This is the ultimate case of a company operating with double standards as they sell hazardous products in developing countries that have been banned in the U.S. since the 1970s," Gottesfeld added.

As a result of this research, consumers in Cameroon are being warned to avoid purchasing paints unless the [cans](#) are labeled with as having no added lead. Most of the paint available in the market contains hazardous levels of lead that causes birth defects, brain damage, high blood pressure, and other health effects in both children and adults.

CREPD is issuing a warning following the results of a recent survey showing that most of the new paints being sold in stores still contain lead at excessive levels despite pledges by some paint companies to reformulate.

"The problem we are seeing is that the older paint is still in stores because none of the companies have recalled products with hazardous levels of lead," said Gilbert KUEPOUO, Coordinator of CREPD. "As a result, we are asking consumers to look for labels that indicate that lead levels are less than 90 parts per million (PPM) as required in the U.S., China, and other countries."

PPG sent a letter to some of the distributors offering to exchange some products, but few responded.

CREPD recently interviewed the managers of the 11 stores that sell Seigneurie paints and identified only three that had returned products based on the companies offer. There are no regulations regarding the lead content of new paints in Cameroon.

The World Health Organization estimates that 240 million people around the world are overexposed to lead contamination and 99 percent of those most severely exposed reside in [developing countries](#). [Lead](#) paint in housing contributes significantly to children's exposure resulting in brain damage, mental retardation, lower educational performance, and a range of other health effects.

More information: The complete article in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene* has been made available for a free download here: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10 ... 15459624.2013.768934](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15459624.2013.768934)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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