

Connecticut Department of Public Health
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Fax Cover Sheet

DATE: December 30, 2005

TIME:

TO: Directors of Health
Chief Sanitarians
Lead Contacts
Lead Consultant Contractors

PHONE:
FAX:

FROM: Alan J. Buzzetti, RS
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RE: Lead in Vinyl Lunch Boxes – Advisory and Information Sheet

cc: LPPCP Staff, Suzanne Blancaflor

Number of pages including cover sheet: 7

Message:

Please see the enclosed information regarding lead in vinyl lunch boxes. Please note that the Consumer Product Safety Commission has not issued a recall of these products. We are forwarding this information to you due to recent media interest in this issue.

You may contact Lead Poisoning Prevention and Control Program staff at (860) 509-7299 should you have any questions.

Advisory1

Department of Public Health

Lead Poisoning Prevention & Control Program



Lead in Vinyl Lunch Boxes – Information Sheet

Recently a number of news stories have featured the presence of lead in children's vinyl lunch boxes. The information provided in this packet will clarify the Connecticut Department of Public Health's position on this matter.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has not issued any recalls of these products. However, they have distributed a question and answer sheet that explains their position on this matter (see attached).

Recently, the New York State Attorney General issued a recall in that state of some of these products because the products contained lead levels that exceeded New York State levels for lead in packaging products. Please note that this recall does not apply in the State of Connecticut. The New York State legal definition of product packaging is very different from that of this state. Thus, the New York Attorney General was able to issue a recall in that state.

Our recommendations for handling questions regarding this matter are:

- Have consumers contact the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection, Product Safety Division at 860-713-6115 with their concerns.
- Refer to the New York State Attorney General's Web Site for more information on the specific products that have been recalled in that State. The web site address is: <http://www.oag.state.ny.us/>.
- Consumers may voice their concerns regarding consumer products that contain lead and lodge complaints with retailers in Connecticut that continue to carry such products.

Attachments:

1. Center for Environmental Health www.cehca.org - New York Company Recalls Lead-Tainted Lunchboxes
2. Consumer Product Safety Commission www.cpsc.gov - Vinyl Lunch Boxes Question and Answer
3. Good Morning America, November 5, 2005
4. News Release from New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer

Center for Environmental Health www.cehca.org

New York Company Recalls Lead-Tainted Lunchboxes

November 29, 2005

contact: Michael Green, 510-378-7333; Charles Margulis, 510-697-0615

Lunch Box Maker to Pull Hazardous Products from New York Stores

Children's lunchbox distributor Fast Forward LLC, one of the companies that the Center for Environmental Health (CEH) took legal action against this summer for their lead-tainted lunch boxes, has reached an agreement with the NY Attorney General to recall twenty-two styles of children's lunchboxes from stores in New York State. In addition, WalMart will voluntarily pull the Fast Forward lunchboxes from their stores nationwide. Fast Forward lunchboxes that tested for high lead levels in independent tests commissioned by CEH included products featuring well-known children's characters such as Superman, Tweety Bird, and Powerpuff Girls. After independent testing commissioned by CEH showed high lead levels in vinyl lunchboxes that pose a potential health hazard to children, the CEH legal action against lunchbox makers brought national attention to the problem and prompted health officials across the country to conduct their own investigations.

"This is a welcome first step in our drive to protect children from lead in lunchboxes," said Michael Green, Executive Director of CEH. "The companies involved in making and selling children's lunchboxes must now come together to insure that all children are protected. We will continue to pursue our legal action to forge an industry-wide standard for safer lunchboxes."

The Fast Forward recall puts pressure on other lunchbox makers to follow-suit. CEH testing found levels of lead in lunchboxes made by other companies that were as high or higher than the Fast Forward products. For example, an Angela Anaconda lunchbox produced by Anaheim-based Targus International tested at 56,400 parts per million of lead, more than 90 times the 600 ppm legal limit for lead in paint in children's products. This and other lead-tainted lunchboxes may still be available in New York and nationally.

Consumer Product Safety Commission www.cpsc.gov

Vinyl Lunch Boxes Question and Answer
October 5, 2005

Question: Recent news reports have indicated that there are dangerous levels of lead in kid's lunch boxes, is this correct?

Answer: CPSC staff has tested samples of children's lunch boxes for accessible lead and found no instances of hazardous levels. The staff tested the inside and outside of each lunch box and the preliminary results were consistently below one microgram (one millionth of a gram) of lead. This is an extremely low level of lead and would not present a health hazard to children.

Question: How can you be sure that children are not being exposed to hazardous levels of lead in their lunch boxes?

Answer: One way that children can be exposed to lead is from handling objects with accessible lead and then placing their hands in their mouths. Based on the low levels of lead found in our tests, in most cases, children would have to rub their lunch box and then lick their hands upwards of 100 times a day, for about 15-30 days, in order for the lunch box to present a health hazard.

Question: What is CPSC doing to prevent issues like this from coming up in the future?

Answer: CPSC staff encourages companies to use alternatives to lead in products intended for children. CPSC staff also recommends that manufacturers and importers of vinyl lunch boxes test their products for accessible lead using the CPSC staff's laboratory test procedure <http://www.cpsc.gov/phth/vinyltest.html>>. Finding and preventing lead hazards in children's products is an important part of our mission and CPSC has a proven record of working with companies to recall products that pose a lead hazard to children.

Unless otherwise stated, any views or opinions expressed in this e-mail (and any attachments) are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Copies of product recall and product safety information can be sent to you automatically via Internet e-mail, as they are released by CPSC. To subscribe or unsubscribe to this service go to the following web page: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.asp>.

Good Morning America

November 5, 2005

A "Good Morning America" investigation revealed that some lunch boxes contain trace amounts of lead, a material that is especially hazardous for children.

The Center for Environmental Health tested 150 lunch boxes and found lead in 23 imported from outside the country. The Consumer Product Safety Commission found some lead in 25 lunch boxes it tested, but said the amount of accessible lead is well below hazardous levels. The Center for Environmental Health and some parents say any amount of lead is too much.

"I wouldn't want any lead in a children's lunch box at all," said Alex Sunter, the mother of a preschooler. Nearly half a million children are permanently injured by lead poisoning each year, with the greatest danger coming from lead paint in older homes. Ingesting even small amounts of lead can cause developmental problems, learning disabilities and even brain damage.

"I think we want to see as little lead as possible in products that come in contact with children or other people, no question about it," said Hal Stratton, chairman of the CPSC. "We are worried about lead that is accessible. If there's lead in a product and you don't get it into your system, then it's not a problem."

The CPSC found there was a problem with lead in imported vinyl mini-blinds in the 1990s because hazardous amounts could become accessible over time. Manufacturers immediately stopped adding lead to vinyl mini-blinds sold in the U.S.

Most U.S. vinyl manufacturers have stopped using lead in all products, but some overseas companies add it to strengthen and stabilize their products. Home testing kits can detect lead in any product and are available at hardware stores for about \$8.

NEWS RELEASE FROM NEW YORK ATTORNEY GENERAL ELIOT SPITZER

Contact: Marc Violette
(518) 473-5525

For Immediate Release:
November 29, 2005

VINYL LUNCH BOXES CONTAINING LEAD RECALLED: Spitzer Secures Agreement Allowing N.Y. Consumers to Return Lunch Boxes for Refund

(Albany, NY) Attorney General Eliot Spitzer today announced a series of efforts to protect the public and the environment from exposure to lead contained in certain children's lunch boxes.

Spitzer's office has reached an agreement with Fast Forward, LLC, a wholesaler of consumer products, to recall thousands of children's lunch boxes identified as an environmental risk. In addition, two of the nation's largest retailers, WalMart and Target, have voluntarily pulled those lunch boxes from their shelves.

Fast Forward, which imported the lunch boxes from China, has also agreed to establish procedures to prevent it from selling or distributing products that violate hazardous materials laws and to ensure that the recalled lunch boxes are disposed of in accordance with New York's environmental rules.

"The recall of these children's products will protect children and our environment from the damaging effects of lead," Spitzer said. "I commend the distributor and WalMart and Target for acting promptly to address this important matter."

Between March and September 2005, thousands of soft plastic and mesh lunch boxes distributed by Fast Forward were sold by retailers across New York. Lead was used as an ingredient in the lunch boxes to help keep the vinyl stable.

New York retailers that sold the lunch boxes at issue in the Fast Forward recall include: WalMart, Target, Cookies, JC Penney, Sears, Toys R Us, Value City, Rainbow, Marmaxx and RB Distributor. The Fast Forward Company's label appears on the inside of the recalled lunch boxes.

Spitzer's investigation revealed that some of these vinyl lunch boxes contain levels of lead that exceed environmental protection laws. Laboratory tests determined that certain lunch boxes, specifically those with the comic book heroes Spiderman and Superman, had lead levels that exceeded a state law that limits the levels of lead and other heavy metals in packaging products or other packages.

Lead is a toxic metal that can cause neurological and developmental damage in children.

When Spitzer's office brought the matter to the attention of two of the nation's largest retailers, WalMart and Target, both immediately agreed to pull the remaining lunch boxes from their shelves.

In settling the investigation, Fast Forward agreed to recall from consumers and retail store shelves various vinyl lunch boxes featuring Spiderman, Superman, Batman, the Fantastic Four, and Precious Moments, as well as lunch boxes featuring Rocawear products (see attachment).

New York consumers who return lunch boxes to the retailer where each lunch box was purchased by February 28, 2006 will receive a cash refund with a receipt, or a store credit if they have no receipt. Consumers may also obtain a full refund by returning lunch boxes directly to Fast Forward by February 28, 2006 with a Refund Request Form available from the New York Attorney General's Office.

Consumers may visit the New York Attorney General's website, www.oag.state.ny.us or call the Consumer Protection Hot Line (800-771-7755) to receive a list of the recalled lunch boxes and the retail stores that sold each style of box or to obtain a Refund Request Form.

Consumers with questions about the lunch box recall may also call Fast Forward, toll free, at 877-244-4433. Fast Forward agreed to pay \$7,000 in civil penalties and costs. Assistant Attorney General Benjamin Bruce of the Rochester Regional Office is handling the case.