



Governments Agree to Set Legal Limits on Lead in Paint in Africa

Participants of UNEP workshop agreed that African countries should adopt a lead limit for all paints of 90 parts per million.

Addis Ababa, 4 December 2015 - Government officials and stakeholders from 15 African countries joined by their counterparts from around the world at a workshop jointly organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Persistent Organic Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN) in Addis Ababa agreed to cooperate to phase out the use of lead in paint by 2020.

The release of lead into the environment poses significant risks to human health and the environment. World Health Organization lists lead exposure as one of the top ten environmental health threats globally. No level of lead exposure is safe for people, and children are especially vulnerable. Paints that contain lead additives pose a risk of lead poisoning, especially for young children.

Mr. Samba Harouna, UNEP representative in Addis Ababa, stated in his welcome remarks that lead exposure brings about a tremendous economic loss, amounting to 135 billion dollars per year, equivalent to 4 per cent of GDP. He pointed to the fact that only 59 countries in the world had a legal limit on lead in paint.

He encouraged countries to join the global efforts of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint - a partnership of governments and stakeholders convened by UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO) - to introduce a legal limit on lead in paint in all countries worldwide by 2020. He also called for countries to join efforts and resources to implement the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union in order to achieve this target.

Mr. Mehari Wondimagegn, Director in the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, Ethiopia, announced that his department is now in the process of developing draft regulation for consideration by the Ethiopian Council of Ministries that would establish a 90 parts per million (ppm) standard for decorative paints. This standard is based on a recommendation from the Ethiopian Standards Agency, which has consulted the paint industry on this issue.

At the workshop, Ms Angela Bandemeher, Chair of the Advisory Group of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, presented the Toolkit for Establishing Laws to Control the Use of Lead in Paint, available on UNEP's website. The toolkit provides information on health and environmental impacts, alternative paints, challenges for small and medium sized enterprises, etc. It also includes case studies from countries where legal limits were successfully introduced, such as Uruguay and the Philippines.

The workshop, participants reviewed the existing policy and initiatives for phasing out lead paint in African countries. An East African standard applicable to five East African countries is being developed to limit the lead content in decorative paint. Similar initiatives exist in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The participants agreed that efforts are needed in each country to phase out lead paint and set a total lead content limit of 90 ppm. They also agreed that this limit should be harmonized within the sub-region.

The delegates expressed their hope that their cooperation with the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint would follow the successful example of UNEP Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, which has resulted in phasing out of lead in gasoline in most of the world's countries. Developing laws and regulations at country or sub-regional levels that will set legal limits, raise awareness, involve stakeholders and build political commitments were identified as key to a successful phasing out. UNEP is expected to publish a global report on progress made on establishing lead limits in paints at the second meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 2), which will be held in Nairobi in May 2016.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

About the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint

Since its establishment in 2009, the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint has been joined by partners from 11 governments, three Intergovernmental Organizations and 31 non-governmental entities.

<http://www.unep.org/chemicalsandwaste/LeadCadmium/LeadPaintAlliance/CurrentPartners/tabid/104120/Default.aspx>

The Alliance's activities are guided by an advisory group chaired by the United States of America and consisting of Government representatives from Colombia, the Republic of Moldova, Kenya, Thailand, IPEN (International POPs Elimination Network), HEAL (Health and Environmental Alliance), IPPIC (International Paint and Print Ink Council), Akzo Nobel (a paint company), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The workshop was a joint event of the UNEP East Africa Subregional Workshop on the Establishment of Legal Limit on Lead in Paint and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It was attended by government officials and stakeholders from Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Experts from the United States of America, GEF, UNEP, UNIDO, WHO, IPEN and a number of other organizations also participated.

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