



Lead in Children's Lunch Boxes



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Press Release

August 31, 2005

A Back to School Warning: Children's Vinyl Lunch Boxes Can Contain Dangerous Levels of Lead

Oakland, CA – The Center for Environmental Health (CEH) announced it is filing lawsuits today against makers and retailers of soft vinyl lunch boxes that can expose children to harmful levels of lead. The Center has also notified several other companies of violations under California's toxics law Proposition 65 (Prop 65) for lunch boxes with high lead levels. The lawsuits and violation notices against companies including Toys "R" Us, Warner Brothers, DC Comics, Time Warner, Walgreens, and others involve many lunch boxes featuring beloved children's characters including Superman, Tweety Bird, Powerpuff Girls, and Hamtaro. The level of lead in one lunch box, an Angela Anaconda box made by Targus International, tested at 56,400 parts per million (ppm) of lead, more than 90 times the 600 ppm legal limit for lead in paint in children's products.

"Lead exposure should not be on the lunch menu when kids' go back to school this fall," said Michael Green, CEH Executive Director. "There is no reason to expose children to any lead from lunch boxes. We are calling on these companies to recall these products and take action to eliminate lead from their products in the future."

Initial independent laboratory testing commissioned by CEH has already found seventeen lunch boxes with high lead levels, and the group's investigation is ongoing. In addition to the testing on the Angela Anaconda lunch box, tests on

other lunch boxes showed levels of lead between two and twenty-five times the legal limit for lead paint in children's products. In most cases, the highest lead levels were found in the lining of lunch boxes, where lead could come into direct contact with food. Lead is known to be harmful to children even in minute amounts, as it can impair brain development and cause other behavioral and developmental problems. Children may be exposed to lead from lunch boxes when they eat food that has been stored in them. Handling the lunchboxes just before eating could also be an exposure risk.

It is not possible to tell by appearance whether a vinyl lunch box may contain lead, so CEH is advising parents to avoid vinyl lunch boxes altogether.

"Parents may need to seek out alternatives, since many mass produced lunch boxes are vinyl or vinyl-lined," said Green. "A reusable cloth bag would be a good alternative." Parents can find information on how to test for lead in their children's lunch boxes at home at www.cehca.org/lunchboxes.htm.

The CEH lawsuits were filed today against lunch box producers Igloo and InGear, and against retailers Toys "R" Us, Walgreens, Big Lots, and Ross Stores. Earlier this year, CEH sent notices of Prop 65 violations to Targus International, DC Comics, Time Warner, Warner Brothers, Binney & Smith (a division of Hallmark and the makers of Crayola-brand lunch boxes), Fast Forward LLC, and Holiday Fair Incorporated. Under Prop 65, companies have sixty days to respond to violation notices, after which lawsuits can be filed. CEH expects to file more notifications of lunch boxes that violate Prop 65 in the near future.

Photos of the lunch boxes can be found at www.cehca.org/lunchboxes.htm .

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Test Your Child's Lunch Box

Because it is not possible to tell by appearance whether a vinyl lunch box may contain lead, CEH is advising parents to avoid buying vinyl lunch boxes altogether as we cannot guarantee they are lead free. You can test vinyl lunch boxes you already own using a hand-held lead testing kit, often available at hardware stores. Two reliable and easy-to-use brands are PACE's Lead Alert (also available by calling 1-800-884-6073) and LeadCheck (also available online at www.leadcheck.com). For a visual demonstration of how to use LeadCheck, please visit www.testyourlunchbox.com.

If your child's lunch box tests positive please call CEH at 800-652-0827. We can help you interpret the results and can use your product as evidence in our ongoing work get the lead out of our children's lunch boxes.

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Commonly Asked Questions

What products did CEH test?

CEH has only tested soft plastic lunchboxes. We don't know whether lead may be present in hard plastic or metal boxes at this time. The brands that have tested high include Generation Sports, Frozn/Ingear, Roundhouse/Targus, Crayola, American Studio, Igloo, Sanford, Fast Forward, Arizona Jean Company, JC Penny, Lisa Frank, Animations/Accessory Network, Holiday Fair/Mischief Makers, Extreme Gear/Romar, SubZero/Global Advantage, Chill, Big Dogs, Childress baby bottle carriers, Innovo, East End Accessories/Worldwide Dreams. Not all lunchboxes with these brand names necessarily contain lead.

How dangerous are lunchboxes with lead?

The levels CEH found in the lunchboxes are not high enough by themselves to cause acute lead poisoning during normal use. However, with prolonged use or if your child is exposed to lead from other sources, a leaded lunchbox would add to their health risk. Because lead has been shown to cause developmental problem in young children at very low levels, CEH believes it is important to eliminate all controllable sources of lead exposure, including lunchboxes.

Does my lunchbox have lead?

The majority of lunchboxes that CEH tested do not contain lead. However, at this time the only way to know for sure is to test the lunchbox yourself.

How do I test my lunchbox?

You can test vinyl lunchboxes using a hand-held lead testing kit available at most hardware stores. Most brands turn a bright pink color when they are rubbed on a surface containing lead. A clear or orange swab means there is not lead. Parents should rinse the test solution off of a negative box before re-using it.

Two reliable and easy-to-use brands are PACE's Lead Alert (also available by calling 1-800-884-6073) and LeadCheck (also available online at www.leadcheck.com). For a visual demonstration of how to use LeadCheck, please visit www.testyourlunchbox.com.

What do I do if my lunchbox has lead?

If your child's lunchbox tests positive, we recommend that you do not use it any longer. Please send CEH your positive lunchbox so that we can add it to our investigation and notify other parents. Please include your contact information (including email and mailing address), when and where you purchased the box. Boxes can be mailed to:
Center for Environmental Health, 528 61st Street Suite A, Oakland, CA 94609

What alternatives are there to vinyl lunchboxes?

CEH does not have enough information at this time to recommend any brand of soft plastic lunchbox that we can assure is lead-free. A reusable cloth bag is a good alternative, and several manufacturers also make insulated cloth

lunchboxes.

Where is the lead from?

CEH believes that the lead is intentionally added to the vinyl (PVC) plastic as either a stabilizing agent or pigment.

Should my child be tested?

The levels in the lunchboxes CEH has tested are not high enough by themselves to cause acute lead poisoning with normal use. However, if your child is also be exposed to other sources such as lead paint, they may be at risk for certain health effects. A blood test is the only definitive way to test for lead poisoning. Children six and under are particularly sensitive to lead's effects.

Where can I find more information?

You can contact CEH by calling 800-652-0827 and download CEH's factsheet on preventing lead poisoning [here](#).

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Photos and Fact Sheets

Below are some of the lunch boxes that tested high for lead in laboratory tests. CEH recommends against buying any lunch boxes made with vinyl.

A fact sheet on the issue of lead in lunchboxes is available [here](#), and our [lead poisoning brochure](#) gives general information on preventing lead poisoning.





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Get Involved!

The Center for Environmental Health is a non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the public from environmental and consumer health hazards. We would greatly appreciate your **support** in keeping our work possible. [Click here](#) if you would like to make a contribution, or learn about other ways you can support CEH.

If you would like to join our **mailing list**, send an email to bmourad@cehca.org. On average, we send four to five emails per year, and action alerts on pressing issues such as this one; we also have a newsletter we send by “snail mail” one to two times a year. If you would like to be included on this list, please include your address.

Spread the word! Let your friends, family, and community know about the important work being done by CEH. Use our [factsheet](#) on lunchboxes to spread the word within your community. Organize educational events at your PTAs, school, or religious institution on issues like lead in lunchboxes to get more parents, children and members of the community involved in environmental health issues.

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