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PRESS RELEASE

DENR Secretary and EU Ambassador Advocate a Lead-Free Philippines!

24 June 2014, Quezon City. The government of the Philippines and the European Union have joined hands to protect school children from chemicals known to have serious toxic effects on the brain.

During a school visit organized by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the European Union (EU), Environment Sec. Ramon J.P. Paje and EU Ambassador Guy Ledoux signed a Solidarity Statement and led stakeholders in pushing for “Lead and Mercury Safe Schools for Bright and Healthy Children.”

Lead and mercury are highly toxic chemicals known for causing lifelong and irreversible damage to a child’s brain and health even at low levels of exposure. Childhood exposure to lead, in particular, has been blamed for reduced intelligence as measured by decreased IQ points, prompting health experts to recognize “lead caused mental retardation” as a disease. 600,000 new cases of children with intellectual disabilities due to lead exposure occur worldwide every year according to the World Health Organization.ⁱ

The event took place at the Commonwealth Elementary School (Commonwealth Ave., Quezon City)—regional winner for the DENR’s Search for Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Schools. Secretary Paje and Ambassador Ledoux were accompanied by senior officials from the Department of Education and the Department of Health, as well as 200 kids, parents, local government officials, doctors, and environmentalists.

Sec. Paje led the signing of a “Solidarity Statement” to signify stakeholders’ agreement to promote and uphold “Lead and Mercury Safe Schools,” specifically “by using lead safe paints and safely reducing lead paint hazards to contain and minimize hazardous dust, and by switching to mercury-free alternatives towards a toxics-free, zero waste educational system.”

The event drew special attention to the Chemical Control Order (CCO) for lead and lead compounds recently promulgated by the DENR that sets 90 parts per million as total lead content limit for lead in paints, as well as prohibits the use of lead in the manufacture of beverage and food packaging, school supplies and toys.ⁱⁱ

“We want to enable our paint industry to shift to lead-free production. There is now a global action for the elimination of lead in paints, and certainly this CCO is our way of showing our oneness with this advocacy,” stated Sec. Paje.

“Chemical safety and security must be a priority of the schools. May this undertaking inspire more schools to commit towards lead and mercury-safe school environments for Filipino children,” he added.



EcoWaste Coalition is a partner organization of the Asia Lead Paint Elimination Project, a project of IPEN. IPEN is an international organization promoting safe chemical policies and practices that protect human health and the environment.



This project is funded by the European Union

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“The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development while maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedom. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and people beyond its borders.”

Ambassador Ledoux congratulated the DENR for issuing the CCO, emphasizing that “the country’s ongoing switch to non-lead paint production is key to protecting the health of children and other vulnerable populations from the debilitating effects of lead exposure.” “A school environment that is safe from lead and other harmful chemicals will have a positive impact on children’s health and their potential to grow, develop and succeed in life,” the EU Ambassador said.

The European Union supports the Asian Lead Paint Elimination Project to eliminate lead in paint and raise public awareness about the adverse human health impacts of lead-based decorative paints, particularly on the health of children below the age of six. The project is a PHP 80 Million grant implemented in seven Asian countries. The EcoWaste Coalition is the leading project partner in the Philippines.

For her part, Aileen Lucero, National Coordinator of the EcoWaste Coalition, said: “We hope DepEd can make it mandatory for all schools to require only lead safe paints for paint purchases and donations. This will effectively curb children’s exposure to leaded paint chip and dust and bring about improved IQ, enhanced school performance and economic success later in life.”

Lucero cited a recent scientific study that calculated the economic impact of childhood lead exposure in low and middle-income countries at PHP 42 trillion per year. The Philippines ranked second highest in Asia in terms of economic loss due to reduced economic productivity resulting from lead exposure.ⁱⁱⁱ

During the event, the stakeholders also recognized the other efforts of the government to address the problems with lead and mercury such as the phaseout of mercury in medical devices in all healthcare facilities and institutions, the ban on consumer products with violative levels of lead and mercury, and the signing of the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the ensuing effort to get the treaty ratified.

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More explanations about lead exposure through lead in paint:

Children are not generally exposed to lead from paint while the paint is still in the can or even when the paint is being newly applied to a previously unpainted or uncoated surface. Rather, the lead exposure generally occurs after the lead paint has already dried on the wall or on the article that has been painted.

Painted surfaces deteriorate with time or when disturbed, and lead from the paint then contaminates household dust and soils surrounding the home. Children can then ingest lead from dusts and soils during customary hand-to-mouth behavior, after which neurological damage occurs.

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References:

ⁱ http://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/lead/en/

ⁱⁱ <http://denr.gov.ph/news-and-features/latest-news/1643-denr-prohibits-use-of-lead-in-local-production-of-food-packaging-paints-toys-other-consumer-products-.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/1206424/>