

Notes on DIPP meeting on lead in paints held on Friday, Feb. 12, 2010

General comments :

The meeting chaired by Joint Secretary Anjali Prasad began with some remarks by the chair about wanting to bring down added lead content in paints to zero with particular reference to toys. This comment was made in the backdrop of the recent CSE study on toys. The gathering was told Prime Minister's office was taking an interest in the matter and there could be no going back on having mandatory standards for lead in paints. Their seemed to be a sense of urgency on the part of DIPP to put in place lead safety standards for paints in toys.

Specifics :

Industry associations namely Indian Paints Association and its associates the ink and pigment manufacturers spoke next reeling out statistics about the industry. The meeting was told the world was not getting out of lead chrome based pigments. Further it was emphasised that government should not try to hurt the industry. At this point the chair intervened and asked what was the solution? The industry representative responded by saying the government should not ban lead as it goes in to industrial products. In fact it was suggested that there should be a list of uses where lead chrome should be used.

Next the chair inquired if dual set of paints was feasible to which toy industry association representative said paints should be easily available and should be clearly marked so.

This was followed by a discussion about what items should not have lead in paints. All toys, stationary items and tooth brushes were discussed as potential candidates. At this point DIPP director suggested that having a negative list of items would be useful. This list would comprise items where lead can be used and the onus was on stakeholders to give suggestions. Some names for the list were discussed such as road marking paints, hoardings, automotive and engineering industries and marine paints.

DIPP was of the opinion that industry was not serious about the whole issue of lead in paints. Industry was told DIPP would get tough if needed. So it was decided that suggestions would be invited from stakeholder for a list of uses where lead in paints would be permissible.

BIS was given a chance to explain its position. The BIS official said the agency has set up a number of groups to review raw materials and product specifications for lead in paints and this exercise would be completed in a few months. The official also explained that on the basis of lead content the standards could be divided into three categories:

1. Under 300 ppm referred to as lead free in BIS terminology
2. 300-600 ppm
3. 600-1400 ppm –in this case the term lead restriction was explained as 1000 ppm or less

DIPP officials emphasized that toys will have to be lead free (zero). At this point Toy Association of India representative said no where in the world was the standard for lead zero.

Decisions:

The meeting ended with the following decisions.

1. Examine EN71 in respect of toys specifically lead and toxicity elements.
2. BIS will give specification of Indian standard, comparison to EN71 and a copy of Indian standard.
3. Stakeholders to provide list of uses in which lead can be used in paints without harming human health/safety by Monday, Feb. 15.
4. BIS has set up groups to review existing standards on paints, pigments, etc.

Another meeting would be called before passing a final order on paints.