

CASE STUDY

Regulating lead in paint in Morocco

Morocco

This case study presents the process of establishing the legal basis to protect human health from the risk caused by lead in paint.

Goals and Objectives

With the aim to reduce or eliminate the health risk from lead in paint to humans, especially to young children, the Ministry of Health of Morocco set about regulating the lead content in paint by adopting a standard of 90 parts-per-million (ppm), based on the level recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Project Overview

Context

In Morocco, as is the case elsewhere in the world, lead paint is one of the most common sources of exposure to lead, particularly in young children. Until 2020, there were no restrictions on lead content of paint in the country. That constituted a serious health risk. Thus, the Moroccan Ministry of Health, inspired by the action areas of the WHO Chemicals Road Map – specifically, “institutional capacity” – has scored recent success in regulating the limit of total lead in paint.

Approach

Under the national regulatory framework, the lead content of paint can be regulated via the implementing provisions of a pre-existing statute (decision or decree), or through a standard.

Considering that Morocco does not yet have a framework law on chemicals, and being aware of the need to act quickly to limit this type of exposure, the Ministry of Health chose to adopt a standard (which, like all new national standards, is voluntarily enforceable), and subsequently to make it mandatory.

To do this, the Ministry of Health initiated the development of standard NM 03.3.318/2020 through the National Standardization Committee in which the relevant ministerial departments and the private sector are represented. This standard was officially adopted in 2020. Following adoption, the Ministry of Health organized a conference on the occasion of the International Week for the Prevention of Lead Poisoning in 2020 to raise awareness within the private sector and among the relevant ministerial departments of the harmful effects of lead-based paints and the need to make the standard compulsory.

Capitalizing on the success of this initiative, the Ministry of Health officially approached the ministry responsible for industry, which has the power to make the standard mandatory.



Results

The decree to make national standard NM 03.3.318/2020 mandatory has been signed and it is published in the [official bulletin](#).

The standard limits all lead compounds that may be found in paint; the legally binding limit on lead in paint is 90 ppm, which applies to all types of paint.

Consequently, the total lead content of paint produced, imported and marketed in Morocco may no longer exceed 90 ppm. To facilitate the technical application of standard NM 03.3.318/2020, other standards exist, such as standards NM ISO 15528, NM ISO 1513 and NM 03.3.022 for sampling and sample preparation.

The regulation will undoubtedly help to prevent human exposure to lead in the form of lead paint – especially among children.

The adoption of this standard is a successful example of the leadership demonstrated by the Ministry of Health in the field of health protection, and of the excellent collaboration between the ministries involved. The private sector has also demonstrated its responsiveness and commitment to addressing health risks when the scientific evidence has been clearly presented.

Lessons Learned

The health risks associated with chemicals can be obvious to health-care professionals; however, it is necessary to develop solid advocacy to persuade other stakeholders about this issue, especially the institutions responsible for managing these kinds of risks.

It is also important to have a good understanding of the national regulatory framework, so as to select the most efficient way to regulate the use of hazardous chemicals.

For the Moroccan Ministry of Health, the lack of a framework law on chemicals was a big obstacle to regulating lead paint. However, effective advocacy to the private sector and the relevant ministerial departments helped to overcome this hurdle.

Recommendations

To succeed in adopting regulation on lead paint in Morocco, the Ministry of Health took into account the four action areas recommended in the WHO road map on chemicals.

The health sector can make an effective contribution to safe management of chemicals only if it:

- (1) develops its awareness-raising capacities to reduce risks;*
- (2) accumulates scientific evidence based on risk assessment and factual data;*
- (3) thoroughly understands the regulatory framework in order to influence national legislation; and*
- (4) demonstrates leadership for mainstream “Health in all policies” (HiAP) relating to chemicals.*

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