

Analysis of Proposed Consent Order to Aid Public Comment
In the Matter of Imperial Paints, LLC, File No. 1623080

The Federal Trade Commission (“FTC” or “Commission”) has accepted, subject to final approval, an agreement containing a consent order from Imperial Paints, LLC, a limited liability company (“respondent”), doing business as Lullaby Paints and Ecos Paints.

The proposed consent order has been placed on the public record for thirty (30) days for receipt of comments by interested persons. Comments received during this period will become part of the public record. After thirty (30) days, the Commission will again review the agreement and the comments received, and will decide whether it should withdraw from the agreement or make final the agreement’s proposed order.

This matter involves respondent’s marketing, sale, and distribution of purportedly “VOC-free” paints. “VOC” is the abbreviation for volatile organic compounds. VOC-free includes claims such as “zero VOCs,” “0 VOCs,” and “No VOCs.” According to the FTC complaint, respondent made unsubstantiated representations that its paints: (1) are VOC-free; (2) are VOC-free during or immediately after painting; (3) will not emit any chemical or substance, including VOCs, that causes material harm to consumers, including sensitive populations such as babies, pregnant women, and allergy and asthma sufferers; and (4) will not emit any chemical or substance, including VOCs, during or immediately after painting, that causes material harm to consumers, including sensitive populations such as babies, pregnant women, and allergy and asthma sufferers. The FTC further alleges that respondent provided independent retailers with promotional materials containing the same claims it made to consumers. Thus, the complaint alleges that respondent engaged in deceptive practices in violation of Section 5(a) of the FTC Act.

The proposed consent order contains three provisions designed to prevent respondent from engaging in similar acts and practices in the future. Part I prohibits emission-free and VOC-free claims unless both content and emissions are actually zero or at trace levels. The orders define “emission” to include all emissions (not just VOCs that cause smog). This definition reflects the Commission’s Enforcement Policy Statement and consumer expectations: consumers are likely concerned about the potential health effects from exposure to chemical emissions found in indoor air, not just VOCs that affect outdoor air quality. The order defines “trace level of emission” to mean (1) no intentionally added VOC, (2) emission of the covered product does not cause material harm that consumers typically associate with emission, including harm to the environment or human health, and (3) emission of the covered product does not result in more than harmless concentrations of any compound higher than would be found under normal conditions in the typical residential home without interior architectural coating. Part II prohibits misleading representations regarding emission, VOC levels, odor, and any general environmental and health benefit of paints. The order requires competent and reliable scientific evidence to substantiate these representations. Part IV prohibits respondent from providing third parties with the means and instrumentalities to make false, unsubstantiated, or otherwise misleading representations of material fact regarding paints, including any representation prohibited by Parts I or II.

To correct existing unsubstantiated zero emission and VOC claims, Part III requires the respondent to send letters to its dealers and distributors, instructing them to put stickers on paint cans to obscure allegedly unsubstantiated emission and VOC claims.

Part V through IX are reporting and compliance provisions. Part V mandates that respondent acknowledge receipt of the order, distribute the order to certain employees and agents, and secure acknowledgments from recipients of the order. Part VI requires that respondent submit compliance reports to the FTC within sixty (60) days of the order's issuance and submit additional reports when certain events occur. Part VII requires that respondent must create and retain certain records for five (5) years. Part VIII provides for the FTC's continued compliance monitoring of respondent's activity during the order's effective dates. Part IX is a provision "sunsetting" the order after twenty (20) years, with certain exceptions.

If the Commission finalizes the agreement's proposed order, it plans to propose harmonizing with this order the consent orders issued in the PPG Architectural Finishes, Inc. (Docket No. C-4385) and The Sherwin-Williams Company (Docket No. C-4386) matters. Specifically, the Commission plans to issue orders to show cause why those matters should not be modified pursuant to Section 3.72(b) of the Commission Rules of Practice, 16 C.F.R. § 3.72(b).

The purpose of the analysis is to aid public comment on the proposed order. It is not intended to constitute an official interpretation of the proposed order or to modify its terms in any way.