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August 13, 2015

Dawn Sweeney, President and CEO
National Restaurant Association
2055 L St. NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036

RE: Asbestos-Free Crayon Pledge

Dear Ms. Sweeney:

We write on behalf of the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to eliminating asbestos-related diseases and protecting asbestos victims' civil rights, and EWG Action Fund, a 501(c)(4) organization whose mission is to protect health and the environment by educating the public and advocating on a wide range of environmental issues, including the hazards posed by asbestos. Last month, EWG Action Fund released the results of its study of asbestos in children's products. Tests by an independent government-certified laboratory found asbestos, a known carcinogen, in several brands of children's crayons, including Amscan and some sold under the names of popular children's characters such as Mickey Mouse, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Power Rangers. The presence of asbestos in crayons is most likely attributable to asbestos-contaminated talc, which is used as a binding agent in many brands of crayons. According to the package labels, all the crayons that contained asbestos were manufactured in China and imported to the U.S. We have enclosed a copy of the report for your reference.

Asbestos exposure is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide and up to 15,000 deaths in the U.S. annually. If inhaled, asbestos fibers can cause fatal cancers and chronic lung diseases, including mesothelioma and asbestosis. Official guidance from the federal Occupational and Safety and Health Administration states that there is no safe level of asbestos exposure. Children have an increased lifetime risk because of the long latency period between exposure and symptoms. The U.K. Committee on Carcinogenicity estimated that the lifetime risk of developing mesothelioma is about 5 times greater for a child first exposed at age 5 compared to an adult first exposed at age 30.

Following the EWG Action Fund report, Senators Edward Markey (D-Mass.) and Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) called on retailers named in the report to remove asbestos-containing crayons from their shelves to protect children from the serious health risks of asbestos exposure. As the Senators stated, "children's playtime should be filled with fun, not asbestos." Party City, Dollar Tree, Toys "R" Us, and Buy-Rite all responded to the Senators' request and discontinued the sale of these asbestos-containing crayons. Several retailers also called on their suppliers to reformulate their products to remove possible asbestos contamination.

We at ADAO and EWG Action Fund applaud the actions taken by these retailers, but also recognize that such steps will not remove asbestos-contaminated crayons from the market entirely. Although EWG Action Fund did not test crayons obtained from restaurants for asbestos, it is unknown whether the crayons handed to children with their menus are asbestos-free. Crayons are a common element of the family dining experience, with many restaurants providing crayons and coloring paper to entertain children before and during the meal. Parents should not have to worry whether the crayons at their favorite family restaurants contain a known carcinogen.

ADAO and EWG Action Fund urge the National Restaurant Association to encourage its members to pledge to use only asbestos-free crayons. Many of the highest grossing restaurants that provide crayons to children are also members of the National Restaurant Association. The asbestos-free crayon pledge will allow families to enjoy their meal with peace of mind that the crayons at the table do not pose a risk to their children.

Sincerely,



Linda Reinstein
President, CEO and Co-Founder
Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization



Alex Formuzis
VP, Strategic Campaigns
EWG Action Fund