

Are Personal Care Products Safe?  
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We expect our shampoo, soap, deodorant, creams, sunscreen and make up we use on a daily basis to be safe, but are they? The Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow has concerns about the safety of our personal care products. They are sponsoring a Safe Cosmetic Week of Action from June 18, 2005 to June 26, 2005. During this week, their volunteers have been talking to counter staff and managers at local department store cosmetic counters and cosmetic stores and leafleting outside of stores about toxic chemicals in cosmetics, gathering petition signatures and posting ads in communities throughout the country.

Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow

Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition is a founding member of the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow. According to Susan Roll from the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, supports the precautionary principle: "When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically." Roll translates that to mean, "the companies should put products on the market that are safe; we should not have to prove that they are harmful before they are banned." Roll indicated one third of the personal care products contain ingredients classified as possible human carcinogens. The Food and Drug Administration does not regulate cosmetics, with the exception of dandruff shampoos, anticavity toothpastes, skin protectorants, antiperspirants and sunscreens. The cosmetic companies are self regulated by a group called the Cosmetics Ingredients Review Panel.

In September 2004, the European Union's new amendment, a Cosmetics Directive, went into effect. The Cosmetics Directive, which is 80 pages, prohibits the use of known or suspected carcinogens, mutagens and reproductive toxins from cosmetics for sale in European Union countries. The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics is asking companies such as L'Oreal, Procter and Gamble and Estee Lauder to reformulate their products globally, not just in Europe, which has higher standards.

What to Avoid

The Safe Cosmetics Campaign's website has a link to the Environmental Working Group site called Skin Deep. Various personal care products from shampoos to cosmetics are rated by the Environmental Working Group for safety, with 10 as the worst. Ingredients are also listed.

Tim Kropp, PhD., the toxicologist from the Environmental Working Group, worked on the safety ratings. Kropp's group took an established list from U.S. government and other groups such as the International Agency for Research on Cancer, which is part of the World Health Organization, and matched them up with ingredients in products. According to the World Health Organization's website "The World Health Organization is the United Nations specialized agency for health."

Kropp found parabens, phthalates and n-nitrosamines in products, out of the 10,500 ingredients in 7,497 products, particularly concerning. Many personal care products have parabens, which is a preservative and an antimicrobial. The Skin Deep's website states that parabens "May alter hormone levels, possibly increasing risks for certain types of cancer, impaired fertility, or alteration of the development of a fetus or young child" and are "Not yet assessed for safety by the cosmetic industry's Cosmetics Ingredient Review board." According to Kropp, parabens build up in the body and concentrate in fat tissue. He indicated, if one uses less products with parabens in them, one's exposure is decreased. Kropp stated that phthalates are rarely on labels and could be listed as a fragrance. A recent Environmental Health Prospective Study came out expressing concerns about phthalates. N-Nitrosamine is concerning to Kropp as he finds it to be a harmful impurity especially as cosmetics have no expiration date.

One ingredient, titanium dioxide is in soaps, sunscreens, lipstick, foundation and many other products we use on a daily basis. According to the Environmental Working Group's database, titanium dioxide is in 2,416 products and is "thought to possibly cause cancer in humans, based on limited data" and has been "not yet assessed for safety by the cosmetic industry's Cosmetic Ingredient board."

John Warner, PhD., who started the first Green Chemistry graduate program at University of Massachusetts, indicated he is familiar with reports that the "powdered form of titanium dioxide can be hazardous due to the size if it is inhaled." Warner is unaware of any reports that titanium dioxide is not safe in other forms. Frank Johnson from the National Institute of Environmental Health Science, the National Institutes of Health is not concerned about titanium dioxide in cosmetics other than powdered form, but he stated he hasn't done a study on it in cosmetics. Johnson opined that since the risk of too much sun exposure is well established, the risk of using sunscreen with titanium dioxide is small compared to the benefits. Kropp from the Environmental Working Group agreed that titanium dioxide is concerning in powdered form and not other forms.

Aubrey Hampton, wrote "Ten Synthetic Cosmetic Ingredients to Avoid", for the Organic Consumers Association's website [www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org). Hampton's recommends to avoid using cosmetics containing: "Imidazolidinyl Urea and Diazolidinyl Urea, Methyl and Propyl and Butyl and Ethyl Paraben, Petrolatum, Propylene Glycol, PCP/VA Copolymer, Sodium Lauryl Sulfate, Stearalkonium Chloride, Synthetic Colors, Synthetic Fragrances and Triethanolamine."

### Pending Bills

There are currently three bills restricting use of chemicals, pending in our state legislature which are: An Act for a Healthy Massachusetts: Safer Alternatives to Toxic Chemicals (S. 553H. 1286), An Act to Reduce Asthma by Using Safer Alternatives to Cleaning Products (S. 114/H2738), and An Act Relative to Safer Alternatives for Mercury-Containing Products, (S. 554/H. 1392). These bills are a positive step to address environmental issues.

## Industry's Position

Mary Carrick, an Assistant in Public Affairs from the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association provided a written response to the Skin Deep site. Industry's position is that Skin Deep is "junk science...replete with erroneous conclusions and highly misleading statements designed to alarm consumers needlessly."

## Education

What can we do? As consumers, we can first educate ourselves by reading and learning about ingredients in current products we are using. By visiting [www.safecosmetics.org](http://www.safecosmetics.org), which links to the Environmental Working Group's website, called Skin Deep, we can review their position on safety of the products. Kropp indicated that the Environmental Working Group's website will be updated by having more products listed and a refined analysis.

"A Consumer's Dictionary of Cosmetic Ingredients," written by Ruth Winter and updated in February 2005, can also assist in that endeavor by giving us a definition of what the cosmetic ingredients are.

We can try new products if what we have been using has ingredients that are concerning. U.S. companies, such as Aubrey Organics, Inc, Burt's Bees, Avalon Natural Products, Tom's of Maine and Suki Naturals, sell products with nature based ingredients. Dr. Hauschka Skin Care and Logona Kosmetick also carry natural ingredients in their products. Some alternatives of cosmetics and other personal care products are available at Whole Foods, who will provide free samples to try these products. Sam Bergman, of The Beauty Connection in Newton Center is beginning to sell natural cosmetics and other personal care products and intends to have a larger selection within six months.

The more educated we become, we should inform the companies of concerns we may have. It is my hope in the future that we will not have any concerns about any of the personal care products we use.

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