

# Environment, health, and safety

## Chemicals before breakfast

### Why the cosmetics industry needs a makeover

By Charlotte Brody, RN

**IF YOU'RE LIKE MOST PEOPLE**, you start your day by dosing yourself with more than 100 chemicals. Think about your morning routine. Mine can include shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, hair gel, toothpaste, moisturizer and sunscreen and, on special occasions, foundation, powder, blush, lipstick, and mascara. My daily use of personal care products is about average, according to the Skin Deep report by the Environmental Working Group. Skin Deep also reveals that every day, the average person applies products containing 176 chemicals.

A reasonable person might think that chemicals used so much by so many, including pregnant women, would be among the safest. And a reasonable person might think that an assurance of safety based on a review of scientific studies would come from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), especially given the three planks of its mission:

- to promote and protect the public health by helping safe and effective products reach the market in a timely way
- to monitor products for continued safety after they are in use
- to help the public get the accurate, science-based information needed to improve health.

But when it comes to managing chemical ingredients in the products we use most, reason doesn't seem to apply. As the FDA's website explains: "The FDA's legal authority over cosmetics is different from other products regulated by the agency, such as drugs, biologics, and medical devices. Cosmetic products and ingredients are not subject to FDA pre-market approval authority, with the exception of color additives."

In short, the analgesics and antihistamines in American drugstores undergo pre-market safety testing. The toothpaste, deodorant, and shampoo do not.

Two years ago, the European Union (EU) took action to address the safety of cosmetics. Under a new EU law, 1,100 ingredients known to cause cancer, birth defects, or reproductive problems cannot be used in cosmetics.

With companies reformulating their products for Europe, eight organizations saw an opportunity for global improvement in the safety of personal care products and created the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics. The goal is to protect consumers and workers by requiring the health and beauty industry to phase out the use of chemicals linked to cancer, birth defects, and other serious health concerns.

The Campaign asks companies to sign the Compact for Safe Cosmetics, a pledge to phase out toxic chemicals. More than 400 companies, most representing smaller brands, have signed. The giant cosmetics companies have not, though Estée Lauder, L'Oréal, and Revlon have agreed to reformulate their U.S. products to meet the new EU standards.

The EU law and consumer pressure to apply the EU standards globally have resulted in products that are safer than they were 2 years ago. In August, two giants in the nail care industry, OPI and Del, joined Avon, Cover Girl, Max Factor, Orly, Revlon, L'Oréal and Maybelline in removing the phthalate DBP (di-n-butyl phthalate) from their nail polish lines. This chemical affects the developing reproductive system, especially the testes, so DBP-free nail polish is better for our health, especially for the fetal development of baby boys. But the vision of every child being born free of toxic chemicals can only come with a new system of government protections that requires enough data from manufacturers to assess the safety of products, including cosmetics, before they are put on store shelves.

The 2006 House of Delegates of the American Nurses Association (ANA) passed a resolution, "Nursing Practice, Chemical Exposure and Right to Know." In this document, the ANA resolves to endorse the National Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, encourages constituent member associations to educate nurses and the public about cosmetics, and urges U.S. cosmetics companies to sign a compact to remove untested chemicals from cosmetics by 2010.

For more information, visit [www.safecosmetics.org](http://www.safecosmetics.org). ★

#### Selected resources

[www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep2](http://www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep2)

<http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/fda101/sld001.html>

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/cos-206.html>

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