

Why should we be concerned about the chemicals in personal care products?

There are over 80,000 chemicals currently registered for use in the U.S. Around 85% of these have never been tested for their effects on human health. There is very little hazard information available on these chemicals and some have been associated with adverse health effects.

The chemical-physical properties cause many chemicals to build up in the human system (body fat) or if excreted by the body, constant re-exposure maintains elevated body levels. Scientists estimate that everyone alive today carries within her or his body at least 700 contaminants, most of which have not been well studied (Onstott et.al). This is true whether we live in a rural or isolated area, in the middle of a large city, or near an industrialized area. Because many chemicals have the ability to attach to dust particles and/or catch air and water currents and travel far from where they are produced or used, the globe is bathed in a chemical soup. Our bodies have no alternative but to absorb these chemicals and sometimes store them for long periods of time.

How are we exposed to these chemicals?

- *Ingestion*: contaminated food and water, and accidental ingestion from contaminated hands
- *Breathing*: volatile chemicals from many common sources enter our blood when inhaled into our lungs
- *Skin absorption*: organic chemicals from many common sources are absorbed directly through the skin

Chemicals to look for on the list of ingredients:

- Phthalates (pronounced 'thal-lates')
- Triclosan
- Formaldehyde
- Lead acetate
- Butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT)
- Sodium lauryl/laureth sulfate
- Parabens

Does the law protect us?

Currently, there is NO legal requirement:

- to test products for safety before selling
- to disclose all ingredients on labels

Even personal care products found in the natural foods section of stores may contain harmful contaminants. The claim that a product is 'natural' has no legal meaning. Also, if cosmetic products are determined hazardous, product recalls are voluntary.

How can you protect yourself and others?

- Reduce your exposure by buying safer products
 - Avoid products that list 'fragrance' as an ingredient
 - Choose products labeled 'phthalate-free', 'paraben-free' and/or "EU Compliant"
- Ask manufacturers to make their products safer, use consumer pressure
- Contact your legislators and members of Congress in support of policy changes

For more information:

Alaska Community Action on Toxics	www.akaction.org	(fact sheets, CHE calls, presentations)
Campaign for Safe Cosmetics	www.safercosmetics.org	(public policy information, business info)
Skin Deep Cosmetic Safety Database	www.cosmeticsdatabase.com	(safety database to look up products)