

# Toxic News

## COSMETICS AND YOUR HEALTH

Have you ever counted how many cosmetics or personal care products you use in a day? Chances are it's nearly 10.

And chances are good that they include shampoo, toothpaste, soap, deodorant, hair conditioner, lip balm, sunscreen, body lotion, shaving products if you're a man, and cosmetics if you are a woman. And what about your children? On any given day you might rub, spray, or pour some combination of sunscreen, diaper cream, shampoo, lotion, and maybe even insect repellent on their skin.

Most people use these products without a second thought, and believe that the government must certainly be policing the safety of the mixtures in these myriad containers. But they are wrong about this. The government does not require health studies or pre-market testing for these products before they are sold. And as people apply an average of 126 unique ingredients on their skin daily, these chemicals, whether they seep through the skin, rinse down the drain, or flush down the toilet in human excretions, are causing concerns for human health, and for the impacts they may have to wildlife, rivers and streams.

### Why personal care products?

At first blush it may seem that mascara and shaving cream have little relevance to the broader world of environmental health. Think again. In August 2005, when scientists published a study finding a relationship between plasticizers called phthalates and *feminization of U.S. male babies*, they named fragrance as a possible culprit. When estrogenic industrial chemicals called parabens were found in human *breast tumor tissue* earlier this year, researchers questioned if deodorant was the source. And when studies show, again and again, that *hormone systems in wildlife* are thrown in disarray by common water pollutants, once again the list of culprits include personal care products, rinsing down drains and into rivers.

At the Environmental Working Group we have researched and advocated on personal care product safety for five years now, and consider it an integral part of our work to strengthen our system of public health protections from industrial chemicals. Here's why:

- **Industrial chemicals are basic ingredients in personal care products.** The 10,500 unique chemical ingredients in these products equate to about one of every eight of the 82,000 chemicals registered for use in the U.S. Personal care products contain carcinogens, pesticides, reproductive toxins, endocrine disruptors, plasticizers, degreasers, and surfactants. They are the chemical industry in a bottle.
- **No premarket safety testing required** — this is a reality of both the personal care product industry and the broader chemical industry as a whole. For industrial chemicals, the government approves an average of seven new chemicals every day. Eighty percent are approved in three weeks or less, with or without safety tests. Advocating that industry have an understanding of product safety before selling to the public finds common messages, common methods, and common gains whether the focus is cosmetic ingredients or other industrial chemicals.
- **Everyone uses personal care products.** Exposures are widespread, and for some people, extensive. Our 2004 product use survey shows that more than a quarter of all women and one of every 100 men use at least 15 products daily. These exposures add up, and raise questions about the potential health risks from the myriad of unassessed ingredients migrating into the bodies of nearly every American, day after day.

### No safety testing

According to the agency that regulates cosmetics, the FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colors, *"...a cosmetic manufacturer may use almost any raw material as a cosmetic ingredient and market the product without an approval from FDA"* (FDA 1995). (Continued on following page...)

The industry's self-policing safety panel falls far short of compensating for the lack of government oversight. An EWG analysis found that in its 30-year history, the industry's self-policing safety panel has reviewed the safety of just 11 percent of the 10,500 ingredients used in personal care products. FDA does no systematic reviews of safety. And collectively, the ingredients in personal care products account for one of every eight of the 82,000 chemicals industries have registered for commercial use with the Environmental Protection Agency.

- *Nearly 90 percent of the 10,500 ingredients FDA has determined are used in personal care products have not been evaluated for safety by the CIR, the FDA, or any other publicly accountable institution.*

While some companies make products that are safe to eat, other companies choose to use known human carcinogens or developmental toxins like coal tar and lead acetate. When risky chemicals are used in cosmetics, the stakes are high. These are not trace contaminants like those found at part-per-million or even part-per-billion levels in food and water. These are the base ingredients of the product, just as flour is an ingredient in bread. These chemicals are found in percent levels in personal care products, nearly all easily penetrate the skin, and some we ingest directly from our lips or hands.

### **Are our products harming our health?**

To learn about the safety of ingredients in personal care products, the Environmental Working Group compiled an electronic database of ingredient labels for 23,205 name-brand products and cross-linked it with 48 toxicity or regulatory databases. Here's what we found:

At Environmental Working Group we consider these results cause for concern, not alarm. Much study remains to be done on exposure levels and health risks. But what we do know shows that such study — and direct consumer action to avoid known toxic ingredients — is absolutely essential.

Cosmetic ingredients do not sit tight of the surface of the skin — they are designed to penetrate, and they do. Scientists have found many common cosmetic ingredients in human tissues, including industrial plasticizers called phthalates in urine, preservatives called parabens in breast tumor tissue, and persistent fragrance components like musk xylene in human fat. Do the levels at which they are found pose risks? For the most part, those studies have not been done. But a recent study showing feminization of human male babies in the U.S. linked to a common fragrance component (diethyl phthalate) joins a small but growing number of studies that serve as scientific red flags when it comes to the safety of ingredients in personal care products.

### **Are our products affecting wildlife, rivers and streams?**

When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sought to understand human exposures to industrial plasticizers called phthalates, they passed up food, water, air, or human blood testing, and targeted urine instead. When ingredients in personal care products seep through human skin into our bodies, many end up in human excretions. Other ingredients get washed down the drain when we wash our hair and bodies in the shower, or clean a day's makeup and lotion off our faces at the end of the day. A growing number of studies in the field of testing that targets what are known as "PPCPs" — pharmaceuticals and personal care products — finds our personal care product ingredients in rivers and streams across the country. And some ingredients have been linked to impacts in wildlife - those that target the hormone system, for example, that have been linked to feminization of fish and other aquatic life.

Personal care products are chock full of chemicals that act like estrogen and that raise concerns with respect to wildlife. Examples? Fifty-seven percent of all products contain paraben preservatives, nearly two percent contain surfactants called alkylphenols and just over two percent contain estrogenic sunscreen ingredients, according to EWG's 2004 product assessment.

EWG's research shows that 50 percent of all products on the market contain added "fragrance," complex mixtures of chemicals, some persistent, some neurotoxic, and some newly found to harm wildlife. Researchers at Stanford University published work in 2004 showing that mussels lost their ability to clear their bodies of poisons when exposed to parts-per-billion levels of common fragrance musks.

When the ingredients in our products are harming wildlife, what must be their impact to us? That is a question that remains unanswered by an industry with near complete discretion over product safety, making slow progress in screening ingredients for safety.