

THE SAFETY OF PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS¹

Dr. Frank Lipman[©]

According to the Environmental Working Group, the average American is exposed to more than a hundred different chemicals from personal-care products every day. We use multiple personal care products—from shampoo to deodorant, lotion to make-up—that contain chemical ingredients that are absorbed through the skin, inhaled or ingested. So it's not surprising that potentially harmful chemicals get into our bodies, our breast milk and our children.

Some of these chemicals are linked to cancer, birth defects, learning disabilities and other health problems that are epidemic in our society. Astonishingly, in the United States, 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women are expected to develop cancer during their lifetimes, according to the National Cancer Institute.

The cosmetic industry asserts that their products are safe, even though 89 percent of the ingredients used in cosmetics today have not been assessed by either the FDA or the industry themselves.

The cosmetics industry's argument is that it is safe to put toxic chemicals into their products because the amount in each product is too small to matter. This is despite the fact that many have been linked to cancer, infertility, hormone disruption and other health problems. But small amounts of toxic chemicals add up and can accumulate in our bodies and none of us use just one product. On any given day, most of us use toothpaste, soap, shampoo, hair conditioner, deodorant, body lotion, shaving products and makeup, most of which have multiple toxic chemicals in them. And when you add this up over a year and a lifetime, it means we are exposed to thousands of them.

In addition, companies are not required to test the ingredients in their products to determine if they cause long term, negative health effects, such as cancer or the inability to have a healthy child. Since there is no government standard for safety, companies can say whatever they want about the safety of their products.

Chemicals linked to cancer and birth defects do not belong in personal care products, period. Why is the Government not protecting us against these harmful chemicals? Cosmetics are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but compared to food and drugs, cosmetic products receive little government scrutiny, virtually anything can be put in a cosmetic product. Also major loopholes in federal law prevent the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or any other government agency from approving the safety of cosmetics and body care products before they can be sold. Interestingly, the Europeans are taking this seriously and in 2005, a Directive passed by the European Union, mandates that chemicals determined to be carcinogens, mutagens or reproductive toxins be removed from cosmetics sold in Europe.

The European Union now bans more than 1,100 chemicals from personal care products because they may cause cancer, birth defects or reproductive problems. In stark contrast, just 10 ingredients are banned from cosmetics in the United States. It is just another example of poor regulation and an industry putting profits before safety of the consumer.

¹ Care2, healthy & green living, August 15, 2010