



Women's
Environmental
Network

briefings

About this briefing

* In this briefing we use the word 'cosmetics' to cover a range of personal care products, including soaps, shampoos, shower gels, hair dyes and treatments, make-up, perfumes, after shaves and body sprays, deodorants or anti-perspirants, moisturisers, cleansers and nail varnish.

This briefing covers general issues around cosmetics use and concerns about some common ingredients. Accompanying fact-sheets give more information about specific types of products, such as skincare and colour cosmetics.

Getting Lippy

Cosmetics, toiletries and the environment

The human desire to look, smell and feel good is one of our oldest and most ingrained. For centuries, people have used cosmetics* to enhance their appearance. But nowadays we are told that our body is no longer a temple, but merely a wild animal which must be tamed, or a canvas on which to paint. The cosmetics industry is now BIG business - in Europe it directly employs 150,000 people. We spend £5 billion a year in the UK alone on cosmetics and toiletries. Women – and increasingly, men and children – are under huge pressure to use cosmetics to subscribe to a certain image, look a certain way, smell a certain way, and attempt to defy the natural process of aging. But we need to start asking ourselves who defines this image, and why do we sometimes find ourselves striving to achieve it?

If beauty is the new religion then cosmetics are the magical fluids and potions needed to attain nirvana.

"Magazines transmit the beauty myth as the gospel of new religion."

Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 1997

- Approximately 93% of British women use cosmetics in some shape or form, making us one of the highest users in Europe;
- UK consumers spend £5bn a year on cosmetics.
- 81% of women in the UK use lipstick; [a] regular users could consume nearly 2lb of it over their life-time (see Factsheet #4);
- Women can use more than 20 different products as part of their daily routine; [c]
- At a WEN workshop 80% of boys aged 9-14 reported using deodorant every day; hair gel was their favourite cosmetic, perfume was the favourite among girls. [b]

The majority of modern cosmetics are complex mixtures of industrially produced synthetic chemicals. Individually these cosmetic products contain very small amounts of chemical ingredients – it is the cumulative and combined effect of applying these ingredients in the many everyday products which comprise our daily routine that gives cause for concern.

Some commonly used chemicals can trigger allergic reactions or chemical sensitivity. Some



are suspected hormone disruptors, and may affect immune and nervous systems; others have been linked to rising levels of birth defects, male infertility and early onset of puberty in girls.

There is increasing evidence that we are all victims of a great big con: the very products the glossy ads suggest will make us look younger, healthier and fitter, and be sexually and socially more successful, may contain ingredients that impair fertility, increase the effects of ageing, disrupt hormones and are linked to cancer, allergies or other health problems.

Some cosmetics carry occupational risks – studies suggest that those who have worked for 10 or more years as a hair-stylist could have a risk of bladder cancer five times that of the general population.

In a random check, WEN found preservatives suspected of mimicking the female hormone, oestrogen, in 57% of products - this is especially worrying for women when lifetime increased exposure to oestrogen is linked to a heightened risk of breast cancer.

Price doesn't protect you - comparisons of expensive and cheap products show that both may contain risky synthetic chemicals – and the vast majority have the same basic formulations as were used decades ago.

continued overleaf

What to do ? We shouldn't have to stop using cosmetics and toiletries, but we should have the assurance that the products we buy are safe, both for ourselves, our families, the planet and its other inhabitants. Turn to p7 for ideas of what you can do.

continued from overleaf

Claims that a product is 'organic' or 'natural' are often as empty as a used shampoo bottle. Synthetic chemicals commonly used in cosmetics are polluting both the environment and our bodies – they have been detected in human body fluids and body fat. We wash large quantities down the drain every day which can then come back to haunt us in our water supply and accumulate in our seas and rivers. Some 5% of triclosan (an antibacterial agent) entering a wastewater treatment plant escapes degradation and is discharged straight back into our environment.

Some ingredients, such as talc and titanium dioxide, have been linked to environmental damage where they are mined.

Use of risky chemicals in cosmetics cannot be seen in isolation, similar chemicals are in a host of other industrially-produced everyday items and are building up in and damaging the environment. The 'cocktail effect' of all these chemicals in combination is not fully understood and current regulations, based on outdated tests on individual substances, are inadequate to control them.

There is hope

A growing number of companies recognise the concerns and are producing cosmetics that contain few or no synthetic ingredients. Others will bend to consumer pressure. You can become an informed user by reading this briefing and following the 'what you can do' suggestions on p7. Most encouragingly, the European union is taking a lead on moving to safer chemicals use. In October 2003 legislative proposals were adopted by the Commission which, if they become law, will provide much greater environmental and health protection in the way chemicals are used in everything from cosmetics to cars.

History: the fickle nature of fashion

"It is important to remember that because beauty ideals are learned, and vary across culture and time, there is really no such thing as a 'natural' beauty. Given the right time period and the right culture, all of us could enjoy a place on the pedestal of a culture's beauty."

Joni E Johnson, *Appearance Obsession*, in Margo Maine's *Body Wars*, 2000

The use of cosmetics is nothing new - there are records of cosmetic use throughout history:

~100,000 BC - Evidence that early humans used ochre to paint their bodies

5000 BC - Green copper ore was used as a crude eyeshadow

68-30 BC - Cleopatra bathed in asses milk to 'improve and whiten the skin'

1610-43 AD - Use of cosmetics encouraged by Louis XIII (France)

1649-58 AD - Use of cosmetics discouraged by Oliver Cromwell

1660-85 AD - Use of cosmetics encouraged by Charles II during the Restoration

1700 AD - Poisonous white lead (lead carbonate) was used by many women to coat the face. Many died as a result

1795 AD - the use of powder for wigs in England became so popular that it created a shortage of flour for food.

In 1770, according to Piesse in his *Art of Perfumery* (1879), cosmetics had become so popular that a bill was introduced into the English parliament including the following:

"That all women of whatever age, range, profession, whether virgins, maids, or widows, that shall, from and after such Act, impose upon, seduce and betray into matrimony, any of his Majesty's subjects, by the scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high heeled shoes, bolstered hips, shall incur the penalty of the law in force against witchcraft and like misdemeanours and that the marriage, upon conviction, shall stand null and void."

Packaging: pretty wasteful

Cosmetics are often over-packaged in bags, boxes and even bubble packaging as well as the plastic casing. It has been estimated that as much as 50% of the cost of a bottle of perfume can be accounted for by packaging and advertising. This is very wasteful, and creates environmental problems in its own right. Packaging is frequently made from polyvinylchloride (PVC), a product of the petrochemical industry associated with the release of dioxins into the environment during its production, use and disposal. Difficult to recycle, much of it ends up in landfill sites.

Some of the chemicals which can leach out of plastic containers into cosmetics include Endocrine Disrupter Chemicals (EDCs; able to mimic hormones). Some phthalates, for example (see page 5), are classified as EDCs, and are added in large quantities to PVC (30-40% of total weight of the PVC) to make it soft and pliable. You can spot PVC-packaged products by looking out for a recycling triangle with a 3 in the centre. Greenpeace recommends that glass containers should be chosen over plastic but where plastic is the only alternative, choose those not made from PVC which can be identified by a recycling triangle with the numbers 1, 2, 4 or 5 in the middle.



"Like the constant dripping of water that in turn wears away the hardest stone, this birth-to-death contact with dangerous chemicals may in the end prove disastrous. Each of these recurrent exposures, no matter how slight, contributes to the progressive build-up of chemicals in our bodies and so to cumulative poisoning.

"Lulled by the soft sell and the hidden persuader, the average citizen is seldom aware of the deadly materials with which he is surrounding himself; indeed, he may not realize he is using them at all."

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1962

Advertising: *does it do what it says on the jar?*

The cosmetics industry is hugely lucrative, and in order to maximise this, enormous sums of money are spent by the large manufacturers to tell us about their products and why we need them.

In the year to March 2001, a massive £32m was spent on advertising facial make-up (including eye make-up), £11m of which was spent solely on advertising lipsticks.

Marketing techniques are used to exploit our insecurities concerning our body image, based on idealised and sometimes enhanced images of women and men. Increasingly children and young people feel the pressure of this daily onslaught.



women are proud of their lines as evidence of full lives, yet others feel pressure to conceal them in a society which values youth above old age.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has upheld complaints against leading cosmetics companies for making misleading or unsubstantiated claims about their products. Procter & Gamble UK claimed their Secret Satin Dry Cream antiperspirant was the 'driest, most effective protection ever' (Nov 2000). NoAge Essential skin care product was claimed by Christian Dior UK Ltd to 'instantly transform skin' and 'optimize the life expectancy of your cells' (Aug 2001). Neither of these manufacturers could provide the ASA with reliable evidence that these products actually did what they claimed. Consequently their adverts were removed. By making claims such as these, the companies feed our anxiety about whether we are doing - and buying - enough for our appearance to be socially accepted. We need to become much more aware of how prevalent and damaging this kind of media influence can be for both women and men.

Studies in the US "found that about 70% of college women say they feel worse about their own looks after reading women's magazines" (Jean Kilbourne, *Deadly Persuasion*, 1999).

Women's magazines in particular must shoulder some responsibility for peddling cosmetics products to women readers - we counted an average of over 30 advertisements solely for cosmetics in a selection of popular women's magazines. Do they think this is the only thing women want to know about?

"Just as 'beauty' is not related to sex, neither is it related to love. Even having it does not bestow love on a woman, though the beauty myth claims that it must."

Naomi Wolf,
The Beauty Myth, 1997

Deodorants, anti-perspirants and body sprays are a good example of the great success story that is marketing: successfully convincing us that our natural aromas are unattractive in order to sell us a cocktail of synthetic chemicals to mask them. Ironically, chemicals produced by our underarm apocrine sweat glands, known as pheromones, are one of the things that makes us attractive to people - the very thing many are trying to achieve by using all these toiletry products in the first place.

Wrinkles are another favourite target of the beauty industry, yet they are a natural result of ageing, caused by the loss of collagen from the deeper layers of skin. Laughing, crying, smoking, pollution, sunlight, and the passage of time all contribute. Many

Labelling

Labels can be a minefield unless you know what you are looking for. Much of the terminology we are all familiar with, thanks to its regular use by the cosmetics industry, can be misleading. Some terms sound scientific or official, but may not actually mean as much as we might think. For instance:

hypoallergenic - the manufacturer feels the product is less likely to cause an allergic reaction, but they are not required to substantiate these claims;

unscented - implies the product has no noticeable odour, however fragrance may still have been added to the product to mask the odour of the other ingredients;

organic - can be used even if as little as one percent of the content is of organic origin; look for the Soil Association (SA) or other organic certification logo. The SA logo is only granted to a product if 95% of its content (excluding water) is from organic sources;

natural - a meaningless word that can be applied to ingredients derived from petrol as much as from plants.

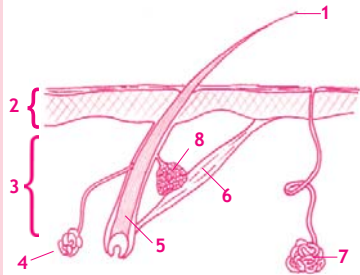
The best way to avoid being misled by marketing jargon is to familiarise yourself with any specific ingredients to watch out for, use the ingredients list on the label, and see through the jargon altogether.

Current EU laws state that all cosmetic and personal care products must contain a list of ingredients, the purpose of the product (unless obvious), any warning statements, precautionary information and restrictions. Perfume compositions and their raw materials do not need to be declared and can be simply described by the word perfume (sometimes seen as parfum or aroma, and fragrance in the US). If it's not in or on the box, the manufacturer is legally obliged to provide a list of ingredients on request. It does not have to show substances used during the production if they are no longer present, nor impurities in the raw materials such as pesticide residues, chemical by-products formed accidentally during manufacture or substances used as a carrier for fragrances. Ingredients do not have to be listed on free samples or small courtesy bottles.

How absorbing?

The skin is the body's largest organ. In the average adult, it covers about two square metres whilst being less than 2mm thick in most places. Made up of several layers, it is an impressive physical barrier designed to protect us from the world around us. The surface layer, the epidermis, completely renews itself in 45-75 days.

A cross section of human skin



- 1 Hair
- 2 Epidermis
- 3 Dermis
- 4 Apocrine sweat gland
- 5 Hair follicle
- 6 Hair erector muscle
- 7 Eccrine sweat gland
- 8 Sebaceous gland

The outer layer is made up of about 15 layers of flat, dead cells – this can be penetrated quite well by some oils and alcohols, so they are often used in skin products to help carry the active ingredients into the deeper layers. This means most of our exposure to the chemicals in cosmetics is via the skin. Once the cosmetic product has been applied, absorption begins – we are only briefly exposed to the chemicals in products which we wash off, such as soaps and shower gels, but have a far greater exposure to the chemicals in products designed to be left on. In an experiment conducted with hair dye under actual-use conditions, 43 micrograms (millionths of a gram) of the dye para-phenylenediamine (PPD; see hairdyes factsheet) was detected in the user's urine after only 30 minutes. Nowadays we are all exposed to many more synthetic chemicals than we were decades ago – not only from our cosmetics and toiletries but also from the chemicals now ubiquitous in our air and water.

Parfum/Fragrance ('Scents and Sensitivity')

The amount of fragrance chemicals used each year is enormous – nearly 1 million kilograms of benzyl acetate, a synthetic 'floral' fragrance ingredient, are used in the US each year. Ingredients in fragrances are the most frequent cause of allergies from cosmetics, and have been found to cause one third of all cosmetic allergies. Children in particular tend to be more sensitive to fragrances, and can develop allergic reactions easily. Data from Sweden shows that perfume is the most common contact allergen in men, possibly caused by shaving, and damaging the skin, increasing the chances of absorbing the fragrance chemicals and thus developing an allergy. Might a similar response occur for women shaving their legs or underarms and then applying cosmetics such as lotions or anti-perspirants/deodorants?



Current legislation does not restrict the quantities or combinations of fragrance chemicals that may be used in cosmetics. This is due to change; the European scientific committee (SCCNFP) has recently introduced restrictions concerning certain fragrance chemicals, many of which are known allergens, either restricting or banning their use completely, or insisting on their labelling in the ingredients list. Currently the law requires only that the label includes the word 'parfum' in the EU or 'fragrance' in the USA. According to the cosmetics industry this is because a typical cosmetic often contains between 50 and 100 fragrances, which is too many to be easily labelled. This creates a problem for people who are sensitive or allergic to a particular fragrance chemical as they cannot determine what compounds are present in the fragrance.

Nitrosamines

Nitrosamines are not intentionally added to cosmetics, but are contaminants accidentally formed either during manufacture or storage if certain ingredients are combined. Able to penetrate the skin, there are no safe levels of these chemicals. Although they have not yet proven to cause cancer in humans, evidence has existed for over 30 years that they are carcinogenic in animals.

Between 1994 and 1997 a survey by the UK Department of Trade and Industry of over 100 consumer products, including cosmetics, found more than half of the cosmetics contained detectable levels of nitrosamines. Some of the highest levels were found in toiletry products designed for use on babies. Follow up tests indicated that levels increased over time, some up to four times previous levels. Many of the products tested were re-formulated and further testing revealed decreased levels of nitrosamines in the products but they were still detectable. The EU recommended setting maximum limits to avoid nitrosamine contamination, particularly of cosmetics.

Products to watch out for are those containing amines or amino derivatives, particularly di- or triethanolamine (DEA or TEA; also MEA), which may form nitrosamines if combined with an ingredient which acts as a nitrosating agent, such as 2-bromo-2-nitropropane-1,3-diol (Bronopol, Onyxs 500), or if they are contaminated with a nitrosating agent, e.g. sodium nitrite. Amines and their derivatives are mostly present in creams, cream lotions, hair shampoos and cream hair conditioners. Beware of mixing products.

Triclosan

Triclosan (or 5-chloro-2-(2,4-dichlorophenoxy)-phenol) is a chlorophenol used in products such as toothpaste, soaps and body washes, including vaginal washes, as well as many household cleaning products for its antimicrobial properties. The human body is a home for many different bacteria, many of which are beneficial. Triclosan cannot target specific bacteria and so will kill all that it comes across, beneficial or not. Researchers from Tufts University in Boston have said that “triclosan is capable of forcing the emergence of ‘superbugs’ that it cannot kill. ...using triclosan daily in the home, in products ranging from children’s soaps to toothpaste to ‘germ-free’ cutting boards, may be unwise”. Washing your hands with soap and water is just as good, and including triclosan in our products may just be additional, unjustified expense. Most hospitals in Sweden stopped using antibacterial products such as triclosan several years ago, considering them to be unnecessary. Despite this, and most concerningly, Swedish research published in 2002 found high levels of triclosan in 60% of human breast milk samples. Environmentally, triclosan is also a problem, and can be converted to dioxin (linked to cancer) when exposed to sunlight in water. Consequently it is classified as “toxic to aquatic organisms and may cause long-term adverse effects in the aquatic environment”.



AHAs

Alpha-hydroxy acids, or AHAs, are found in many cosmetics used as exfoliants, moisturisers and emollients. Originally used as ‘cosmetic peels’, examples include glycolic acid, citric acid, lactic acid and ‘triple fruit acids’. Because they effectively remove the outer layer of skin, they have become increasingly popular and have often been lauded for their ‘anti-aging’ effects. However, extrapolating from the number of reports during the last decade of adverse reactions to products containing AHAs, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that approximately 10,000 reports of adverse reactions would have been received by the manufacturers. AHAs are extensively absorbed into and through human skin. Also, because of their relatively recent appearance on the cosmetics market, there is little data yet on their possible long-term health effects. By removing the outer layer of skin, there are increasing concerns that they could cause increased sun-sensitivity, and thus increase photo-aging (ironic, given their alleged ‘anti-aging’ effects) and the risk of sun-related skin cancers.

Parabens

Parabens are a family of compounds (e.g. methyl-, propyl- and butyl- paraben; also known as -hydroxybenzoic acid, such as methyl-para-hydroxybenzoic acid) widely used as preservatives in cosmetics including shampoos, make-up, lotions and deodorants. Of 76 off-the-shelf, randomly selected products, we found parabens listed in 43 (nearly 57%). Seventeen products contained more than one type of paraben, and six of these each contained five different parabens. Parabens have been detected in human breast tissue and, although they cannot yet be conclusively linked as a possible cause of breast cancer, evidence now suggests they can act as oestrogen mimics. One, propyl paraben, has been shown to adversely affect male reproductive functions; at the ‘daily intake level’ currently acceptable under EC law, it decreased daily sperm production. Parabens are permitted by EC regulations for use as preservatives in cosmetics and toiletries, and can even be present in products labelled as ‘hypoallergenic’.

Phthalates

Phthalates (pronounced tha-lates) are a group of synthetic chemicals (often labelled as e.g. DEP, DEHP, DBP) used as softeners in PVC, and in cosmetics as solvents, fragrance enhancers or to denature alcohol (make it unpalatable). Linked to reproductive damage, phthalates are now so pervasive in the environment that it is difficult to avoid them.

Of 239 people tested in conjunction with the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) for traces of DBP in their bodies, all 239 tested positive.

Women between the ages of 20 to 40 are estimated to be at 20 times greater risk for phthalate exposure, due to their increased use of cosmetics and beauty products.

A study by WEN, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and Health Care Without Harm had 34 brand-name cosmetic products tested

for phthalates by an independent laboratory. They found phthalates in nearly 80% of the products. None of these had phthalates listed as an ingredient on the label.

Products such as deodorants, fragrances, hair gels, hair sprays and mousses, and hand and body lotions, can all contribute to a possible body burden of up to seven different phthalates found by the CDC. Unfortunately, as secondary or even primary fragrance carriers, there is no legal requirement to label them as ingredients, making them difficult to avoid. Even more difficult to avoid are those present as a result of contamination, which the manufacturers themselves may not even be aware of. In January 2003 an amendment to the EC Cosmetics Directive was approved, banning chemicals classified as carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction from use in cosmetic products. Two of the phthalates - DEHP and DBP - are classified as class 2 compounds, toxic to reproduction.

The Law

Animal testing

Cosmetics manufacturers in Europe are legally required to test their products to ensure consumer safety. The methods used for testing are, however, left up to the manufacturer. According to COLIPA, (the European Cosmetic Toiletry and Perfumery Association), the numbers of animals used in the UK for testing cosmetic products and ingredients fell from 31,000 to 2,800 between 1980-1996. This decrease is no doubt due to animal tests having been, where possible, replaced by alternative methods, as required by current EU legislation. According to the RSPCA, however, 2001 figures suggest that around 38,000 animals are still used for cosmetic testing in the EU. This figure is verified by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV), and corresponds with independent estimates cited by COLIPA themselves.



The manufacture and marketing of cosmetics is regulated by the European Cosmetics Directive (no 76/768/EEC). This defines cosmetics and sets down guidelines for assessing the safety of products and for labelling and marketing. The directive has been updated and amended several times since it was adopted in 1976, to adjust to new concerns. The most recent changes were approved in early 2003 to set a deadline for the abolition of animal testing of cosmetics ingredients, and to add to the list of potentially harmful ingredients that should not be used in cosmetics (see phthalates, p5). The Scientific Committee on Cosmetic Products and Non-Food Products (SCCNFP) reviews new scientific and technical information and issues 'opinions' on the safety of products or their ingredients, and makes recommendations for changes.

The directive puts the onus largely on the cosmetics industry for regulating itself, but requires national governments to ensure that only cosmetics that comply with the directive and its annexes are put on the market. In the UK, the Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) is responsible.

Cosmetics will be affected by planned changes to the wider EU legislation on chemicals. Draft legislation was published in 2003 for a new, more precautionary, chemicals policy based on a system, called REACH, for the **R**egistration, **E**valuation and **A**uthorisation of **C**hemicals.

Apart from legislative changes, cosmetics companies have said the only other thing that will make them change their products or ingredients is consumer pressure.

BSE

In January 1990 the Tyrell Report was published suggesting there might be a risk of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) from some cosmetics. Products of concern included some premium anti-wrinkle and anti-ageing facial creams (which contained lightly processed, or even only chilled, extracts including brain, spleen and placental material), plus everyday cosmetics such as creams, soaps and stick-deodorants which contained more heavily processed by-products such as collagen, gelatine and tallow (melted animal fat). In 1990 the UK Cosmetics, Toiletries and Perfumery Association (CTPA) issued a circular to its members advising them to either reformulate their products to exclude any bovine extracts, or to source them from outside the UK. In 1991, Mr Bradley from the Central Veterinary Laboratory said: "I am not satisfied yet that the industry is in the clear and it is us that may shoulder some blame if it is later found ladies are rubbing cow brain or placenta on to their faces." According to the 1999 Edition of EEC Directive 76/768/EEC the use of, amongst other things, brain and spinal cord from cows

and spleen from other animals under 12 months must not be used in cosmetic products. Tallow derivatives may however still be used subject to restrictions.

GM

Many of us are now familiar with the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) possibly entering the foodchain, but it may come as news that some mass-produced cosmetics may also contain GMOs, usually in this case either maize or soya based. Due to consumer concerns, many European cosmetic companies are working to remove GMOs from their cosmetic products, although many US companies still maintain that there is no evidence of harm from GMOs in cosmetics.

What you can do

The onus should be on the manufacturer and government to ensure cosmetics are safe – under all circumstances. An ingredient might be declared safe when tested in isolation under laboratory conditions but how safe is it in a cocktail of other chemicals, used over a long period of time, or combined with the different products you use regularly? You can use your consumer power to ask questions and demand safer products. Less harmful alternatives to the most risky chemicals are available. We need to know that manufacturers are taking a more precautionary approach to risky chemicals, phasing out the most toxic and looking to reduce waste and pollution.

- Never mix cosmetics - such as remnants of your old shampoo with the contents of a new bottle - as they may not be made to be mixed with other chemicals; this may lead to formation of nitrosamines.
- Never allow cosmetics to exceed their best before date - if there is not one listed it means the product has been formulated to have a minimum shelf-life of 30 months.
- Wear less make-up! Try having a day without make-up and note people's reactions.
- Use your consumer choice to buy products which are simply formulated and as ecologically sound as possible. Every time you choose a cleaner product you send a vote to the makers.
- Use some of the easy, natural alternatives, listed separately, instead of the manufactured products.
- Try to avoid synthetic fragrances and perfumes, and opt for diluted essential oils instead.
- Call for the substitution of potentially harmful chemical ingredients with GM-free herbal or plant-based alternatives with a proven safety record, and support the development of alternative testing methods. WEN is against animal testing for cosmetics.
- Beware of the pressures of glossy advertising and exploitative media images.
- Watch out for greenwash (bogus or inflated environmental claims) and 'pseudo-scientific' claims - don't believe the hype!
- Write to the makers of your favourite products and ask them for a list of ingredients - they are legally obliged to send you one; write back asking them to remove any risky chemicals and reduce wasteful packaging.
- Ask about company policies on recycling, animal testing, employment, health and safety, and human rights. Support companies whose policies you agree with. Safer products mean a safer work environment.
- Urge your MP, MEP, SMP, or Welsh AM to back proposals for better regulation, testing and labelling of perfumes, cosmetics and personal care products.
- Try to avoid products in unnecessary packaging. Write to the manufacturers to complain.
- Avoid PVC packaging– this can be recognised by a recycling triangle with a 3 in the middle of it.
- Write to women's magazines and ask them to be more discerning about the advertisements they choose to publish... or you will choose a different publication.
- Learn to love your body – remember if you talked to your friends the same way you talked to your body you would have no friends left! (Marcia Hutchinson *Transforming Body Image*; in *Body Wars*, 2000).
- When travelling request safer cosmetics, not in individual sachets; see our *Greener Ways for UK Holidays* briefing for more information.

Alternatives

There is anecdotal evidence that cosmetics such as soap and shampoo may be superfluous, and that by using them regularly we actually create a need to use them by disrupting the body's regulatory system. If we stop using them we smell for a while, due to the over-production of natural oils as the body overcompensates for the use of cosmetics. However after some time it reverts to its natural level and there are no more 'unpleasant' smells. Some people have not even experienced the 'smelly transitional period', and have continued to wash with water alone, completely forgoing the need for soap and shampoos. Unfortunately, there is no concrete evidence yet to support these findings.



Further reading and useful resources

Cosmetic Products Factsheets:

WEN is producing a series of factsheets to go with this briefing.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 - Antiperspirants/deodorants | 7 - Skin bleaching |
| 2 - Sunscreen | 8 - Baby-care products |
| 3 - Skin-care and toiletries | 9 - Mens toiletries |
| 4 - Make-up and colour cosmetics | 10 - Vaginal washes/gels/lubricants |
| 5 - Hair dye | 11 - Advertising |
| 6 - Hair straightening/curling | 12 - Recipes to make your own |

Contact the WEN office for copies of any of these (20p each).



Books

Cosmetics Unmasked, by Dr Stephen and Gina Antczak, published by Thorsons, UK (2001)
ISBN 0-00-710568-1

The Beauty Myth, by Naomi Wolf, published by Vintage (1991) ISBN 0-679-30870-9

Body Wars – Making Peace with Women's Bodies, an activists guide, by Margo Maine, published by Gurze ISBN 0-936077-34-4

References

- [a] Make-up and colour cosmetics factsheet
- [b] WEN Wales, Ecofun survey results, June 2002
- [c] WEN 'Ending the cosmetics cover up' workshops, 2002; one woman recorded using 26 products as part of her morning routine.

A fully referenced version of this briefing is available on request.

Websites

<http://pharmacos.eudra.org>

To view the European Cosmetics Directive.

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/chemicals/index.htm>

For information on the European chemicals policy.

<http://www.buav.org/gocrueltyfree/index.html>

For details of the Humane Cosmetics Standard, recommended by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV), to help choose cruelty-free products.

<http://www.pitching-green.gov.uk>

Department for Environment (Defra) website for a copy of *A Shopper's Guide to Green Labels*.

<http://www.nottoopretty.org>

Website of international campaign about phthalates in beauty products. *Not Too Pretty* is the American sister report of *Pretty Nasty*, produced in Europe by WEN, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and Healthcare Without Harm.

About WEN

Women's Environmental Network is a registered charity educating, informing and empowering women and men who care about the environment. It researches and campaigns on environmental and health issues from a female perspective.

Individual membership (women & men)

£20 ordinary
£12 unwaged
£40 supporting

Affiliate membership (organisations)
£35-150 depending on size.

Produced by Jo Budd, Sophie Evitt, Helen Lynn, Antonia James, Liz Sutton.

With thanks to the rest of WEN's health team. Cartoons by Angela Martin.

Published by:



**Women's
Environmental
Network**

Supported by:

**COMMUNITY
FUND**
Lottery money making a difference

ISBN 1-874137-12-9

Price 80p where sold

WEN
PO Box 30626
London
E1 1TZ

T 020 7481 9004
F 020 7481 9144

E health@wen.org.uk
W www.wen.org.uk