No More Dirty Looks

Personal Care Products and Ways to Cut Your Exposure, Teach Others, and Push for Chemical Policy Reform

Bhavna Shamasunder, UEP
April 7, 2016

There are an enormous number of unregulated chemicals in personal care products

WHY?
Our chemicals regulatory system is broken

- This is widely agreed upon by scientists, activists, even the chemical industry— but there is almost no agreement on how to fix it.

Chemicals Overview

- 80,000 chemicals in commerce
- 60,000 were in use prior to TSCA in 1976
- Only 1 chemical (PCBs) ever banned outright
- Chemicals are “safe” until proven guilty
- Burden of proof on the EPA, consumers, and the public rather than companies making the product
- This is not the structure in the EU. The use REACH and guided by the Precautionary Principle
There is good emerging research

- Teen girls see big drop in chemical exposure with switch in cosmetics– Just out this past month

Researchers provided teen study participants with personal care products labeled free of chemicals such as phthalates, parabens, triclosan and oxybenzone. These chemicals have been shown in animal studies to interfere with the body’s endocrine system.

Analysis of urine samples before and after a three-day trial in which the participants used the lower-chemical products found significant drops in levels of these chemicals in the body. Metabolites of diethyl phthalate, commonly used in fragrances, decreased 27 percent by the end of the trial period. Methyl and propyl parabens, used as preservatives in cosmetics, dropped 44 and 45 percent respectively. Both triclosan, found in antibacterial soaps and some brands of toothpaste, and benzophenone-3 (BP-3), found in some sunscreens under the name oxybenzone, fell 36 percent.
Chemicals of Concern


- Always avoid products with the word “fragrance”. It could be hiding scores of chemicals in that word.
Steps to Reduce Exposure

1. Simplify
Choose products with simpler ingredient lists and fewer synthetic chemicals. Avoid synthetic fragrance by skipping products with “fragrance” on the label, and use fewer products overall.

2. DIY
Some personal care products are easy to make yourself, and this can be a great project for a party. Make your own sugar or salt scrubs or body oils, using simple, organic ingredients.

3. Research Products Yourself
Since the beauty industry is largely unregulated, it’s up to you to do your own research to find the safest products. There are no legal standards for personal care products labeled as “pure,” “natural” or “organic,” so look beyond the marketing claims and read labels carefully.

4. Use apps like Think Dirty
To find out whether your go-to products are safe or not, Think Dirty’s shop clean app. This easy-to-use resource ranks the safety of specific products on a scale of 1-10 and offers up cleaner solutions.

5. Get Involved/Become an Activist about Chemical Policy Reform!
While it’s possible – and becoming easier – to reduce toxic exposures in your home by buying safer products, it’s not possible to shop our way out of this problem. Even if they’re not in your home, toxic chemicals from personal care products can still end up in our air and drinking water, and in the homes of people who don’t have access to safe products.

The solution: help change the rules of the game! It shouldn’t be legal to sell cosmetics that contain dangerous ingredients. Lots of organizations are working to pass new laws that protect our health and give consumers better information to make smart choices.

There are *some* companies that are trying/better

But we cannot rely on voluntary measures. These lead to an ad-hoc system of governance and a patchwork. Leaving burden on consumers to figure it out.
Apps and Websites

Think Dirty  http://www.thinkdirtyapp.com/

Campaign for Safe Cosmetics  
http://www.safecosmetics.org/

Good Guide:  http://www.goodguide.com/

Environmental Working Group, Skin Deep  
http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/