



A SURVEY OF TOXIC INGREDIENTS IN OUR COSMETICS

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF POLLUTION? Probably not your shampoo, soap or hand lotion. But some of the chemicals found in personal care products aren't that pretty. U.S. researchers identified 10,500 industrial chemicals used as cosmetic ingredients, including carcinogens, pesticides, reproductive toxics, endocrine disruptors, plasticizers, degreasers and surfactants.

In the spring of 2010, the David Suzuki Foundation invited Canadians to pull back the shower curtain and participate in an online survey about toxic ingredients in cosmetics. We asked participants to check ingredient lists for 12 sets of chemicals – a Dirty Dozen ingredients linked to health and environmental concerns, including cancer, reproductive disorders, asthma and severe allergies.

The report summarizes key findings from the survey, highlights weaknesses in Canada's legal framework governing toxic chemicals in cosmetics, and outlines recommendations for strengthening laws and regulations to better protect human health and the environment.

More than 6,200 individuals participated in our survey, providing information for more than 12,500 personal care products. The results are disturbing:

- Almost 80 per cent of products reportedly contained at least one of the Dirty Dozen ingredients;
- More than half of all products reportedly contained multiple Dirty Dozen ingredients;
- Participants were unable to locate ingredient lists on more than 1,000 products.

Equally disturbing, loopholes in Canada's cosmetic ingredient labelling requirements result in incomplete ingredient lists on many products. Notably, manufacturers are not required to disclose specific fragrance ingredients on the product label. Instead, the generic term *parfum* is listed, representing a mysterious mixture of potentially dozens of chemicals.



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Also, personal care products regulated as “drugs” on the basis of therapeutic claims (e.g., tartar-fighting toothpaste, bacteria-killing cleansers, face cream with sun protection) are not subject to the cosmetic ingredient labelling requirements.

Notwithstanding these loopholes, cosmetics are the only type of product, other than food, for which Canadian consumers are afforded the right to know about chemical ingredients. As a result, consumers can seek to avoid at least some toxic chemicals in their toiletries – and many do. Three out of five participants indicated that they check the ingredient list before buying personal care products. But survey results signal how difficult it can be, even for the conscientious shopper, to avoid chemicals of concern. “Buyer beware” is inadequate when it comes to protecting human health and the environment from unnecessary toxic exposures. Government has a role to play in requiring more user-friendly ingredient lists and keeping harmful chemicals out of our products in the first place.

Ninety-eight per cent of survey participants agreed that Canada’s cosmetic laws should be strengthened.

The David Suzuki Foundation offers the following recommendations to protect our health and the health of our environment from unnecessary exposure to toxic chemicals in cosmetics.

1. Replace potentially harmful ingredients in cosmetics with safer alternatives.
2. As an interim step, implement hazard labelling for ingredients linked to chronic health concerns and strengthen EcoLogo™ certification criteria for personal care products.
3. Require pre-market approval of the chemical composition of cosmetics and allow public access to a searchable online database of information submitted by manufacturers.
4. Extend restrictions on cosmetic ingredients to “unintentional ingredients” (e.g., impurities, by-products).
5. Extend ingredient restrictions and labelling requirements to personal care products regulated as “drugs.”
6. Require manufacturers to disclose specific fragrance ingredients.
7. Prohibit use of the terms unscented and fragrance-free in the marketing of products that contain fragrance ingredients (including masking agents).
8. Prohibit anti-bacterial household products, including cosmetics.
9. Restrict use of the terms natural and organic in the marketing of products that contain non-organic and synthetic ingredients.
10. Extend ingredient disclosure requirements to other types of consumer products, including household cleaners, toys and furnishings.

Download the full report at www.davidsuzuki.org/publications.



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