COUNTER INTELLIGENCE

THE TOP 10 COSMETIC INGREDIENTS YOU SHOULD AVOID

According to the National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health, 884 of the ingredients routinely used in cosmetics are toxic. Here are 10 of the most harmful:

Artificial Fragrance. The synthetic fragrances used in cosmetics contain between 10 and 300 different chemicals, many of which have never been tested for safety. Yet, because of the "trade secret" laws, consumers have no way of knowing what these chemicals are. Synthetic fragrances can cause headaches, dizziness, hyperpigmentation, vomiting, skin irritation and anaphylactic shock.

Avobenzene. Also known as Parsol 1789, this broad spectrum sunscreen ingredient breaks down to form free radicals when it is exposed to sunlight. Free radicals are molecules that are missing one electron. These misbehaving molecules can damage DNA and have been linked to a number of disease, including cancer.

Dibutyl Phthalates. Found in perfumes, hairspray, skin creams and nail polish, this plasticizer, which is easily absorbed through the skin, is a hormone disrupting ingredient that can cause deformities in male fetuses. A study by the CDC found particularly high levels of dibutyl phthalate in women of childbearing age and came to the conclusion that the biggest exposure came from the cosmetics they used.

Formaldehyde-Releasing Preservatives. Many common cosmetic preservatives either contain formaldehyde or break down to form formaldehyde. Ones to look for include DMDM Hydantoin, Diazolidinyl Urea, Imidazolidinyl Urea and Quaternium-15.

Parabens. Listed on cosmetic labels as butyl-, ethyl-, methyl-, and propyl- parabens, these preservatives were considered safe until researchers found that they disrupt our hormones by mimicking estrogen. Since these compounds are readily absorbed by the skin and are stored in the body's fatty tissue, your body continues to accumulate them with every use.

Polyethylene Glycol/Polyethylne Compounds (PEGs). PEG compounds can be contaminated with the carcinogen 1, 4-dioxane. These synthetic plant glycols may cause allergic reactions and the FDA is currently studying these ingredients to determine their safety in cosmetics.

Phenylenediamine. Often preceded by an m-, o-, or p-, phenylenediamine is found in permanent hair dyes. Protected under a 1938 FDA exemption, this chemical has been shown to cause cancer in animal experiments, and at least two studies have shown that repeated exposure to phenylenediamine increases the risk of bladder cancer in humans. Phenylenediamine can also cause eczema, bronchial asthma and gastritis.

Synthetic Colors. Labeled as FD&C, D&C or aluminum lakes on ingredient labels, most synthetic colors are derived from coal tar. This thick liquid tar is obtained from bituminous coal which may contain benzene, xylenes, naphthalene, phenol and creosol. These colors cause cancer in animals and are a frequent source of allergic reactions. Although most synthetic colors are protected under current law, the FDA ruled in 1992 that they have not been shown to be safe.

Toluene. Derived from petroleum crude and used primarily as a solvent in nail polish, toluene affects the central nervous system and respiratory tract. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry note that high exposure can occur from the home use of nail polish.

Triclosan. Found in deodorants and anti-bacterial body washes, triclosan is a kissing cousin to a common pesticide known as 2,4-D. Animal tests show that this chemical is toxic to the blood, liver and kidneys and a Swedish study recently found high levels of triclosan in human breast milk.