

writer Danielle Rippingale

# DYING to be beautiful

Your beauty products may smell like a garden and come in pretty packages but that doesn't mean they are natural or safe. Beauty is a multi-billion dollar industry and I think you'll be surprised to learn what is actually in your beauty products. According to the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a top government watchdog group in the USA, the average woman uses 12 personal care products a day, containing 168 chemical ingredients including untested petroleum-derived, animal-tested and genetically modified ingredients.

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## LEGISLATION

Despite taking care to avoid products and practices that are known to be toxic – smoking for example – we all use skin and hair care products in our daily routine. There is good reason to be concerned. The European Union (EU) was the first to respond to the scientific evidence that linked the detrimental effects of beauty products to our health in 2002. Leading by example, the EU's "do not harm" commitment is evident with their banned ingredients list, specific testing requirements and dates for personal care products.

In contrast, the US Federal Drug and Administration (FDA) doesn't require health studies or pre-market testing for personal care products. The EWG reports that the industry's self-policing safety panel, the Cosmetics Ingredients Review (CIR), has reviewed the safety of a mere 13 percent of the 10,500 ingredients used in personal care products over its 30-year history.

## FACE VALUE

Getting under the skin of the beauty industry and examining what is in personal care products and identifying healthy alternatives to mainstream brands is essential for your health and wellbeing, as well as the earth. Even health conscious consumers are unwittingly seduced by images from nature and taglines using the words 'natural' and 'organic'. They are falsely assured that if it is found on the shelf of reputable retailers that these products are screened for health and safety. This is not the case in most parts of the world, including the US where 99 percent of products contain ingredients that have not been assessed for safety by the government, the cosmetic industry's safety panel, or any other publicly accountable institution.

## AESTHETIC VALUE

The truth is, many mainstream brands are formulated by chemists whose primary concern is how the product feels (consistency, how it glides on skin), looks (smell, colour) and functions (hydrating, cleansing), and not the safety or quality of ingredients. This is unsettling when you consider that 64

percent of topical applications are absorbed directly into the bloodstream and bypass the organs of detoxification – the liver and kidneys. Furthermore, the boom in cosmetic nano-technology allows for easy absorption of microscopic chemicals by the skin. If you thought the cruel but necessary testing on animals assured product safety, think again. These tests are conducted to assess skin and eye irritation, not ingredient toxicity, bioaccumulation or cancer.

How dangerous can a dab of this and a spray of that really be? If Horst Rechelbacher, founder of Aveda and new organic line Intelligent Nutrients is anyone to trust his philosophy is "if it's not available in



nature and in food, don't use it." In *Not So Pretty* author Stacy Malkan examines the scientific research that links the chemical exposure from our seemingly innocuous beauty regime with the increasing rates of asthma, hormone-related cancers, such as breast cancer, infertility, birth defects and other health issues. The research suggests that commonly used ingredients have impact on our hormonal system and normal development at doses much lower than previously thought; genes and chemicals can work together to cause disease; the combined effects of chemicals can be en-

hanced and unpredictable; and early life exposure can lead to health consequences later in life.

## MISLEADING LABELLING

Beauty companies have capitalised on the public's concern for safe and healthy products and use the words natural and organic prolifically in their branding. As a consumer, it is necessary to see beyond persuasive marketing and understand that 'natural' has been rendered meaningless with no certification body to identify and regulate the use of the term.

Natural ingredients are often heavily processed during manufacturing, bio-chemically altered, and mixed with other ingredients with unknown effects. A far cry from what Bo Hendgen of Absolute Essentials describes as "what nature intended – so that the intelligence of our body recognises it as our own." Organic by definition refers to plants and animals grown in a natural environment without the aid of man-made synthetics (pesticides, fertilizers etc). Unfortunately, the term organic is being misrepresented and diluted as well.

## MARKETING VS REALITY

Many companies clearly take advantage of the lack of government regulation around the terms natural, organic and even hypo-allergenic. Firstly, unless the label displays a quality seal from an internationally accredited organic certification organisation – such as USDA – it is unlikely that the product has many, if any, organic ingredients. By choosing certified organic products whose ingredients come from controlled organic farming you are caring for the earth, the farmers and yourself. Don't be fooled by a certified organic ingredient or two (in the form of floral waters or essential oils), diluted in a concoction of impossible to pronounce synthetic ingredients.

Secondly, scrutinise the listed ingredients on personal care labels, just as you would nutritional labels on food. Don't assume that because it is expensive or in

**Paraben:** a petroleum-based preservative that mimicks estrogen, is harmful to the liver and linked with breast cancer. Common names include Methyl, Propyl, Butyl and Ethylparaben.

**Phthalates (THA-lates):** these chemical plasticizers are used to hold scents and colours and are strongly linked to birth defects in the male reproductive system and liver damage. Avoid any label with Dibutyl/ Diethyl Phthalate or the word 'fragrances'.

**Synthetic Fragrances:** dozens of chemical ingredients (ie. floral scented Benzyl Alcohol) that have been linked to cancer, neurotoxicity, allergies, bioaccumulation and can be conveniently hidden behind the single listed ingredient 'fragrance'. Avoid products with word 'fragrance'.

**Diethanolamine (DEA), Triethanolamine (TEA):** are 'amines' (ammonia compounds) used as emulsifiers and foaming agents that can cause allergic reactions, eye irritation and dryness of hair and skin. They can form cancer-causing nitrosamines when they come in contact with nitrates and are toxic if absorbed into the body over a long period of time.

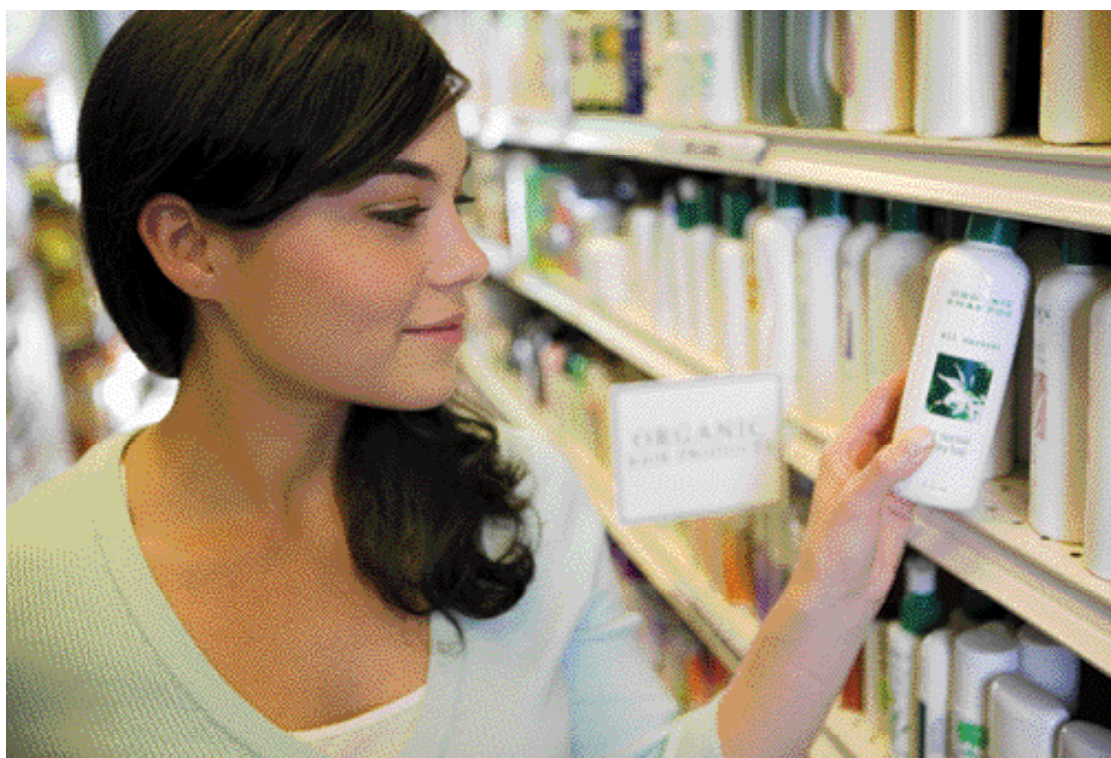
**Petrol-chemicals:** are an inexpensive skincare emollient derived from petrol. Listed among others as triethanolamine, diethanolamine, behentrimonium chloride, mineral oil, paraffin and petrolatum, they are linked to cancer, allergies (skin, eye, lungs) and immunotoxicity.

**Propylene Glycol:** is a syrupy liquid derived from natural gas and used as a moisturizer and carrier of fragrance. It can cause allergic reactions, hives and eczema and has been linked to cancer, bioaccumulation and organ toxicity. Related synthetics: PEG (polyethylene glycol) and PPG (polypropylene glycol).

a health food store that it is more effective, organic or synthetic-free. Noleen Lamb of Regenerate tells consumers, "if it is white – it has gone through some sort of refining process; if you can't pronounce the name on the ingredient list (other than the botanical index) it is highly likely that it is chemical; and look for the certified organic sticker as your personal guarantee."

A user-friendly resource that will help you discern the good, from the bad and the ugly is the EWG Cosmetic Safety Database ([www.cosmeticsdatabase.com](http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com)). The database is not without its faults, however it provides a wealth of information, tips and online safety assessments for 44,838 products, 8,497 ingredients and 1,509 companies and assigns a product score based on ingredients of highest (links

SLS's are cheap and harsh detergents used in the auto industry to clean up oil, yet are the most common ingredient in shampoos and skin cleansers.



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with cancer, developmental/reproductive toxicity) and lowest risk (irritation of skin, eyes, or lungs).

#### SYNTHETIC INGREDIENTS

Research has shown that there are many cheap and commonly used synthetic ingredients of concern including petrochemical surfactants. Derived from petroleum or natural gas, the most common are Propylene Glycol, Cocamidopropyl Betaine and Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS).

SLS's are cheap and harsh detergents used in the auto industry to clean up oil, yet are the most common ingredient in shampoos and skin cleansers. During processing this chemical skin irritant can develop into the contaminant 1,4-dioxane – a known animal and probable human carcinogen. This ingredient is still found in popular baby shampoos, despite availability of natural and healthy alternatives. Beauty products made with high quality organic

natural ingredients and with little processing are safe and effective competitors to mainstream synthetic formulations.

#### CONCLUSION

In your search for natural alternatives it is important to remember that just because a product is natural does not necessarily mean it is gentler or suitable for every skin type (think poison ivy). However, by educating yourself about the toxic ingredients to avoid and looking for organic certification you can slather, lather and spray confident that your beauty isn't costing you your health or the environment. As a final note – avoid waste by using up or donating to a local shelter the products you wish to change. When ready to buy new, recognise the influence of your purchasing habits and let your preferred retailers know that you are seeking safe and genuinely natural product alternatives and together we can clean up the beauty industry. 🌱

# THE GOOD NEWS

In a quest for wellness, consumers have higher value-driven expectations of companies than ever before, including policies around fair-trade, animal welfare, the environment and giving back to the world community. Companies with a conscience are creating beauty products from all over the world that your body and the earth will thank you for seeking out.

New Zealand's first certified organic range was born out of a desire for healthy products for people and the planet. **Regenerate** product ingredients are grown on the Lamb's own organic farm and their 100 percent natural deodorant is tested on humans and is nothing short of amazing.



Vegan-friendly and organically certified, **Mukti** uses active ingredients and airless pump dispensers to protect ingredients from light, air and contamination. Mukti supports fair-trade purchasing and offers potent healing oils rich in antioxidants to promote cell regeneration, hydration and protection.

Using native New Zealand plant sources, **Living Nature's** natural skincare, hair care and cosmetic range is carefully formulated right down to their earth friendly packaging which is bottom capped to limit air exposure, 100 percent recyclable and made from phthalate-free plastic of polypropylene and calcium carbonate (chalk).



As the name suggests, USDA certified **Juice Beauty** uses the powerful antioxidants, polyphenols, and vitamins from organic fruit juices to keep your skin healthy and radiant.



For over 30 years **Comvita** has sung the sweet praises of honey. Their unique Huni skin and bodycare range harnesses the potent and healing properties of NZ UMF®20+ manuka honey, well known for its moisturising, soothing and antioxidant properties.



Well known for its powerful ability to promote skin repair and rejuvenation of skin cells, **Trilogy's** certified organic rosehip oil is a key ingredient in most of their skin and hair care products.

New Zealand's beautiful natural environment has surely been the inspiration behind some of the innovative brands originating from there. With ingredients like NZ avocado oil and Vinanza Gold from the Marlborough sauvignon blanc grape, **Antipodes** creatively weaves antioxidant rich New Zealand plant sources into a premium certified organic skincare range.



Using unique certified organic ingredients from their native Australia, **Stem Organics** soothe and infuse with ingredients like olive leaf and bauhinia bush flower essence in their Antioxidant Toning Infusion and wild harvested kakadu plum extract in their Exquisite Face Fluid.

