

Ugly tips

Apply cosmetics with care. They contain carcinogens

A six-month assessment of 10,500 ingredients in 7,500 personal care products by Environmental Working Group, a US-based research organisation, shows that cosmetics contain a range of elements, from harmless components like table salt to cancer-causing chemicals

The personal care product industry, which is worth US \$35 billion, remains unregulated as all product safety testing is done by a self-policing industry safety committee, the Cosmetic Ingredient Review (CIR) panel

Only 28 of the 7,500 products analysed have been fully assessed by the CIR panel. 99.6 per cent ingredients have never been tested for potential health impacts

One of every 100 products on the market contains ingredients certified as known or probable human carcinogens. Commonly, eight probable human carcinogens are used — coal tar, benzyl violet, formaldehyde, lead acetate, progesterone, selenium sulfide, nitrofurazone, and silica

51 per cent products assessed contain “penetration enhancers”, ingredients that increase a product’s penetration through the skin into the bloodstream, hence increasing exposure to these harmful components

Dibutyl phthalate, a reproductive toxin that targets the male reproductive system, is widely used in nail polishes. The European Union plans to ban it in cosmetics by the end of 2004

Scientists have linked exposure to hair dyes with increased incidence of bladder cancer among hairdressers, barbers, beauticians and cosmetologists

The CIR panel has spent an average of one hour and ten minutes deliberating the use, toxicity, and safety of each ingredient reviewed over its three decade history

Prettiest top 10

Their ingredients are linked to cancer and pregnancy problems

Product	Category	Score*
Clairol Natural Instincts Haircolor, Level 2, Sahara 02	Hair dye	10.0
Elizabeth Arden Ceramide Plump Perfect Moisture Cream SPF 30	Facial moisturiser	9.6
Skim Success Eventone Fade Cream	Anti-aging treatment	9.5
Klear Action Acne Treatment System	Acne treatment	9.4
Nivea for Men After Shave Balm	Shaving products	9.3
OPI Nail Treatments	Nail treatments	9.3
St Ives Apricot Scrub	Exfoliator	9.3
Neutrogena T-Gel Shampoo	Shampoo	9.3
NARS Balanced Foundation	Foundation	9.3
Dove Face Care Essential Nutrients	Facial cleanser	9.2

*A score of 10 means highest health concern

On an average an adult uses nine personal care products daily, with 126 unique chemicals. Little research is available on the health risks of low-dose repeated exposures to these chemical mixtures. But the absence of data should never be mistaken for proof of safety