

Cosmetics Design Europe

Discussions reveal deep divisions on safety of synthetic ingredients

By Guy Montague-Jones

Dec 5/2007 - **Following several high profile cosmetics health scares in recent months, discussions at the Natural Beauty Summit revealed deep divisions within the industry over the safety of certain ingredients.**

Debate has raged in recent years over the health impact of several [synthetic](#) ingredients including parabens, phthalates and sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS).

Most recently the Campaign for Safe [Cosmetics](#) raised the alarm over lead in lipstick and prompted several senators including former presidential candidate John Kerry to call for a full FDA investigation into the issue.

Consumer groups and natural cosmetic manufacturers have led the fight against so-called dangerous chemical ingredients while conventional producers, trade associations and often academics defend current industry practice.

At the Natural Beauty Summit in Paris last week Horst Rechelbacher, the founder of leading naturals firm Aveda, struck the first blow against conventional manufacturers.

In his keynote speech to the conference Rechelbacher linked ever increasing exposure to synthetic chemicals to cancer in children, claiming that the number of cases has increased 125 percent since 1970.

More specifically, the campaigning entrepreneur claimed that regular hair spray use causes lung cancer and called on the industry to follow the mantra 'if you can't eat it don't use it'.

Surfchem technical manager Dr Tony Gough challenged the Aveda founder to support his hair spray claim with scientific evidence.

He responded by inviting Gough to apply hair spray into his mouth for a minute and observe the results.

Risk versus hazard underlies [safety](#) debate

Much of the controversy over certain synthetic ingredients revolves around the distinction between risk and hazard. Is the amount of certain ingredients that are hazardous in high quantities sufficient to present a health risk to the consumer?

Gough told CosmeticsDesign.com that health scares in the cosmetics industry are often ill-founded because they only show that a substance is hazardous and not that exposure is sufficient to pose a risk to consumer health.

He said that even water can be considered hazardous because it can be dangerous if consumed in high quantities.

However, when consumed in normal quantities water does not pose a risk to human health and neither do cosmetics containing hazardous ingredients, added the scientist.

Gough also said that there is no scientific evidence to support claims that natural cosmetics are any better for the consumer than conventional alternatives.

While Gough insisted that synthetic ingredients are thoroughly tested and safe for use, other delegates were less convinced.

Specific ingredients under the microscope

Ken Wells, a spokesperson for naturals manufacturer, Daniel Galvin Junior insisted that certain synthetic ingredients are hazardous and do endanger human health.

Wells told CosmeticsDesign.com that traces of lead in lipstick threaten human health.

Explaining his view, he said since the lips are an efficient delivery system, women will absorb dangerous quantities of lead if they apply certain lipsticks regularly.

He also said that many personal care products including some that are aimed at children contain the commonly used wetting agent SLS, which he claimed causes asthma and aggravates eczema.

However, the US trade association, the Personal Care Products Council (previously the CTFA) claims that there is no evidence that SLS is harmful as currently used in cosmetics products.

Phthalates are another area of controversy. In September, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) warned consumers to avoid exposure to the phthalate DEP, which helps fragrances linger after application.

While the consumer group claimed DEP posed a serious health risk the Fragrance Materials Association (FMA) and the European Commission's Scientific Committee on Consumer Products (SCCP) both insist that DEP is safe for use in cosmetics at current levels.

The FMA said the chemical profiles of different phthalate compounds differ significantly, which explains why the DEP is considered safe in Europe while the phthalates DBP and DEHP are banned in the continent.

The debate over the safety of certain synthetic cosmetic ingredients remains unresolved and the search for the truth is hampered for consumers and manufacturers alike by the spreading of misinformation from interested parties on both sides of the argument.