

# Undisclosed Carcinogens in Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Pose Avoidable Risks of Cancer Warns Samuel Epstein, MD

**CHICAGO** — The following was released by Samuel S. Epstein, M.D., Chairman of the Cancer Prevention

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Government scientists recently identified a group of toxic chemicals known as phthalates in urine of adults, with highest levels in premenopausal women, resulting from inhalation and skin exposure to volatile parent ingredients used extensively as solvents and plasticizers in personal care

President-Elect Bush's wife Laura uses a Cover Girl makeup. One of which, as documented in the references in the attached press release, contains carcinogenic ingredients. *Source: 15jan01 New York Times.*

“Demure in public, Mrs. Bush is said by friends, both men and women, to possess a personal magnetism that she uses to get things done. They point to her flawless complexion (she wears drugstore Cover Girl), her deep blue eyes and her irresistible charm. Her eyes, a male friend said, “They look at you and say: ‘You must obey Laura Bush. You must obey Laura Bush.’ “

and cosmetic (PCC) products. These include perfumes, shampoos, hair sprays and nail polishes. These findings raise major concerns in view of documented evidence, dating back to 1985, that these phthalates induce birth defects, low sperm counts, and other reproductive toxicity in experimental animals. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), authorized by the 1938 Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act to ban unsafe PCC products, responded that it will now “consider” this longstanding information. While obviously important, the phthalate findings merely reflect the tip of an iceberg of more fundamental problems which have received minimal, if any, attention, from Congress, the media and the public.

The FDA's relaxed response reflects reckless regulatory abdication matched by unresponsiveness of mainstream industries. A 1990 report by the U.S. General Accounting Office charging that the FDA commits no resources for assessing PCC safety had no impact on the agency's policies. The agency's sole requirement is restricted to ingredient labelling of PCC products, with the exception of fragrances

and perfumes. With rare exceptions, such as children's bubble baths, the FDA has never required industry to label PCC products with any warning of well-documented toxic or cancer risks, nor has it banned the sale of unsafe products to an unsuspecting public.

- Black and dark brown permanent hair dyes contain numerous ingredients, such as diaminoanisole and FD&C Red 33, recognized as carcinogens in experimental animals. This evidence is supported by studies establishing that regular use of these dyes poses major risks of relatively rare cancers—non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and multiple myeloma.
- Cosmetic grade talc is carcinogenic in experimental animals. Also, frequent genital dusting with talc, routinely practiced by some 17% of women, increases risks of ovarian cancer.
- A group of widely used preservatives, such as quaternium15 and bronopol, widely used in baby products, though not carcinogenic themselves, break down to release formaldehyde, a potent irritant and carcinogen.
- Lanolin, widely used on babies' skin and nipples of nursing mothers, is commonly contaminated with DDT and other carcinogenic pesticides.
- Commonly used PCC detergents and foaming agents, such as polysorbates and PEG, are usually contaminated with the volatile carcinogen dioxane, although this could be easily removed by vacuum stripping during manufacture.
- DEA, another widely used chemical detergent, has been known since 1975 to combine with nitrite preservatives or contaminants in PCC products to form a highly carcinogenic nitrosamine. Furthermore, recent government studies showed that DEA itself is also carcinogenic following application to mouse skin.

Citizen petitions to the FDA by the Cancer Prevention Coalition in 1994 and 1996 detailing evidence on the cancer risks of talc and DEA-containing products, respectively, and "Seeking Carcinogenic Labeling " on these products, met with no substantive response.

Concerns on cancer risks from PCC products are emphasized by: lifelong use of multiple products by the majority of the U.S. population; the ready skin absorption of carcinogenic ingredients, further increased by detergents, especially when left on the skin for prolonged periods; and by decades-long suppression of information by the FDA and industry, abetted by a roll-over media, in flagrant denial of consumers' right-to-know. Mainstream industry products thus pose major risks of avoidable cancer. Their role in the escalating incidence of cancer, now striking one in two men and one in three women in their lifetimes, remains largely unrecognized by our apparently health conscious society. Armed with such information, consumers should

protect themselves by shopping for safe alternative products available from the growing non-mainstream industry.

NOTE: Information on carcinogenic PCC products and on safe alternatives is detailed in: Epstein, "The Politics of Cancer Revisited" (Appendix 14), 1998, East Ridge Press, Hankins, NY (800) 269-2921; Cancer Prevention Coalition's website [www.preventcancer.com](http://www.preventcancer.com) ; and Steinman & Epstein, "The Safe Shoppers' Bible", 1995, Macmillan/IDG, New York (800) 434-3422.

*Source: [Cancer Prevention Coalition](#)*

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