

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF SKIN-DEEP BEAUTY *Fact sheet on Unilever's cosmetics*

Few are indifferent to the images of glamorous models endorsing a widening range of cosmetic products, designed to tweak, twist, stretch, shrink, moisturise and colour the human anatomy. These images seduce middle-class consumers and shape their thoughts, dreams and demands. Most people are aware of the underlying motive – the profit of cosmetics companies. But conscience, even caution, is a poor match for the hypnotic effect of these advertisements. Hindustan Unilever, India's largest cosmetics seller and manufacturer, is one corporation that thrives in this business.

For Unilever to sell its products, it works at a deeper level - shaping and selling public notions of beauty itself. Sadly, much of its marketing carries a racist tinge. Notwithstanding attempts to advertise using 'ethnic' models and settings to capture third-world markets, the predominant notion of beauty sold by Unilever is one of fairness. The sale of products such as *Fair And Lovely* and Emami's *Fair And Handsome* relies on selling and exploiting aspirations to fair and spotless skin. The real beauty in accepting oneself and others, warts and all, is ignored, meant only for Ugly Ducklings who've given up on the fairness dream.

Most alarming, Unilever's products carry immense costs often hidden from the unsuspecting consumer. These costs cannot always be measured in or mitigated by money. Several of Unilever's cosmetics have been found to contain dangerous levels of toxic chemicals with long-term impacts on consumers' health. Further, communities and the environment at the site of production are also affected – for example, inadequately protected workers who are exposed to these toxic chemicals at the manufacturing site, and voiceless animals experimented upon.

This fact sheet lists 42 toxic chemicals found in hazardous quantities in Unilever's cosmetics. It is based on data collected by the Environmental Working Group, a voluntary organization, from a cross-section of research studies on Unilever's brands sold in the west.

Though no such study has yet been done on Unilever's Indian cosmetics brands, there is little reason to expect any more product safety than in the west, given Unilever's track record in environmental pollution, worker safety, human rights or consumer welfare.

List of Toxins found in Unilever Cosmetics

S.No	INGREDIENT	CONCERNS	PRODUCTS
1	COUMARIN	Cancer, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive)	Vera Wang, Eau de parfum
2	2-BROMO-2-NITROPROPANE-1,3-DIOL	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Neurotoxicity, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Contamination concerns (FORMALDEHYDE, NITROSAMINES), Occupational hazards	Suave Shampoo
3	SODIUM BORATE	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Multiple, additive exposure sources	Pond's Cold Cream
4	SODIUM METABISULFITE	Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Occupational hazards	Hair Sprays - Salon, Therma Silk
5	CYCLOHEXYLAMINE	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Neurotoxicity, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Occupational hazards	Hair-sprays - Dove, Suave, Finesse, Salon
6	BHT	Neurotoxicity, Endocrine disruption, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Dove, Suave, Pond's, Degree, Axe, Vaseline (Very high)
7	EUGENOL	Cancer, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Neurotoxicity, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Vera Wang, Chloe Eau de Toilette
8	LIMONENE	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Vera Wang, Chloe Eau de Toilette
9	QUARTZ	Cancer, Persistence and bioaccumulation, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive)	Pond's Purely Polished, Scrub & anti-aging cream
10	OXYBENZONE (BENZOPHENONE-3)	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Enhanced skin absorption, Biochemical or cellular level changes	Vaseline bath and body oil, Sheer moisturiser and face wash
11	TRIETHANOLAMINE	Cancer, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns (NITROSAMINES)	Dove, Ponds, Suave, Vaseline, Sheer
12	BASIC VIOLET 3	Cancer, Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Neurotoxicity, Endocrine disruption, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Occupational hazards	Suave Shampoo
13	ISOEUGENOL	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Vera Wang, Chloe Eau de Toilette

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14	SILICA	Cancer, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Persistence and bioaccumulation, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Biochemical or cellular level changes	Dove, Degree, Suave, Ponds
15	HEXYLENE GLYCOL	Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Ponds, Dove - makeup removers & facial cleansers
16	GLUTARAL	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Occupational hazards	Suave Hot oil Moisturizing conditioner
17	CINNAMYL ALCOHOL	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Vera Wang, Chloe Eau de Toilette
18	COCAMIDOPROPYL BETAINE	Allergies/immunotoxicity, Contamination concerns (NITROSAMINES)	Dove, Pond's, Suave, Caress, Axe, Lever 2000
19	GERANIOL	Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Vera Wang, Chloe Eau de Toilette
20	SODIUM FLUORIDE	Cancer, Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Neurotoxicity, Endocrine disruption, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Multiple, additive exposure sources, Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Occupational hazards	Mentadent toothpaste
21	BENZYL ALCOHOL	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Neurotoxicity, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Occupational hazards	Pond's, Dove, Vera Wang, Chloe
22	DIAZOLIDINYL UREA	Allergies/immunotoxicity, Contamination concerns (FORMALDEHYDE)	Suave, Pond's, Dove, Thermasilk, Escape
23	METHYLCHLOROISOTHIAZOLINONE	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive)	Thermasilk, Dove, Suave, Axe
24	METHYLISOTHIAZOLINONE	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity	Suave, Dove, Thermasilk, Axe
25	METHYLDIBROMO GLUTARONITRILE	Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Thermasilk, Finesse
26	ETHYLENE GLYCOL	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns (ETHOXYETHANOL, METHOXYETHANOL), Occupational hazards	Dove, Suave
27	METHENAMINE	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns (FORMALDEHYDE, NITROSAMINES)	Finesse, Suave, Thermasilk (Shampoos & conditioners)

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28	HYDROGEN PEROXIDE	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Neurotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Occupational hazards	Mentadent Toothpaste
29	ETHANOL	Cancer, Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Multiple, additive exposure sources, Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Enhanced skin absorption	Suave (conditioner, hairspray, shampoo)
30	HYDROXYCITRONELLAL	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Vera Wang, Chloe Eau de Toilette
31	DMDM HYDANTOIN	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Contamination concerns (FORMALDEHYDE)	Suave, Dove, ponds
32	LINALOOL	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs)	Vera Wang, Chloe Eau de Toilette
33	TRICLOSAN	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Endocrine disruption, Persistence and bioaccumulation, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Contamination concerns (CHLOROFORM, DIOXIN)	Deodorant, Lever 2000 bar soap
34	ZINC PYRITHIONE	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Persistence and bioaccumulation, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive)	Suave Conditioner & Shampoo
35	POLYETHYLENE GLYCOL	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns ()	Axe Shower Gel, Dove Advance color care shampoo
36	OCTOXYNOL-9	Endocrine disruption, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Multiple, additive exposure sources, Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Contamination concerns (C9 PHENOLS)	Dove Face care
37	PEG-180	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns ()	Dove Shampoo, Face care
38	PEG-40	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns ()	Suave Skin therapy body wash
39	PEG-90M	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns (ETHYLENE OXIDE, 1,4-DIOXANE)	Salon Selectives hair gel
40	FRAGRANCE	Neurotoxicity, Allergies/immunotoxicity, Miscellaneous	Axe, ponds, Dove, Vaseline, Escape, Suave, Degree
41	CETEARETH-20	Violations, Restrictions & Warnings, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Irritation (skin, eyes, or lungs), Enhanced skin absorption, Contamination concerns (ETHYLENE OXIDE, 1,4-DIOXANE)	Dove (Face care - very high), Vaseline, Finesse, ThermaSilk conditioner

S.No	INGREDIENT	CONCERNS	PRODUCTS
42	ALUMINUM STARCH OCTENYLSUCCINATE	Developmental/reproductive toxicity, Neurotoxicity, Organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), Contamination concerns (ARSENIC, LEAD, HEAVY METALS)	Vaseline, Dove, Ponds.

Source:

1. “Skin Deep” – Environmental Working Group website on cosmetic safety and hazards – profile of Unilever Corporation

Link: http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/company.php?comp_id=1452