

Cosmetic Companies Debate Removing Carcinogenic Chemicals from Products

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Amid Health Concern,

Nail-Polish Makers

Switch Formulas

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At least two major cosmetics makers are phasing out use of a common chemical in nail polish that has emerged as a health concern, especially for women in their childbearing years.

Procter & Gamble Co. said it will reformulate its Max Factor and Cover Girl polishes and Estée Lauder Cos. said it will redo its Clinique and MAC lines, among others, to eliminate the chemical in the U.S. The moves come amid growing opposition to the compound, particularly in Europe. The two companies already have reformulated their polishes there amid the European Union's precautionary approach toward industrial chemicals.

While U.S. regulators tend to wait for clear evidence of problems, the EU has been moving aggressively to remove chemicals with the potential for trouble. The EU has voted to ban two so-called phthalates beginning in September, including di-n-butyl phthalate, or DBP, often used in nail polish and another compound, known as DEHP, sometimes used in fragrances.

Neither P&G nor Estée Lauder said the decision to phase out DBP is an acknowledgment that the chemical is unsafe in nail polish. Another cosmetics maker, Anglo-Dutch Unilever, indicated it doesn't intend to change its formula for U.S. markets, despite the European ban.

The Cosmetics, Toiletry and Fragrance Association, the trade association representing the \$29 billion U.S. industry, said DBP presents no health risk. "This is more a matter of politics than of science," said Gerald McEwan, vice president for science at the Washington-based group.

Phthalates (pronounced THA-layts) are a group of chemicals used to soften and increase the flexibility of plastics. DBP is used in nail polish so its finish doesn't chip as readily. Though there is no proof that DBP harms humans, some evidence indicates the chemical can cause adverse reproductive effects in laboratory animals, particularly among the male offspring of females exposed to high levels.

The National Toxicology Program, a division of the Department of Health and Human Services, acknowledges the risks shown in lab studies, but says the general U.S. population appears to be exposed to DBP at levels too low to be of immediate concern.

The cosmetics industry's trade group, the Cosmetics Toiletry and Fragrance Association, says that the EU directive "may remove valuable ingredients from use in the EU."

Tim Long, a spokesman for P&G, says the Cincinnati company is removing DBP from its nail polishes in the U.S. because consumers prefer the performance of the alternative already introduced in Europe. P&G will make the change in the U.S. in July, and the company intends to eventually phase out DBP globally, Mr. Long says.

Estée Lauder spokeswoman Janet Bartucci says the New York company chose to reformulate globally after the EU moved to ban DBP because Estée Lauder's manufacturing process requires that the company use the same ingredients world-wide.

In March, the San Francisco-based Breast Cancer Fund asked a group of manufacturers among them Unilever P&G Estée Lauder Revlon Inc. of New