








Chemical Facts for Cosmetologists: Formaldehyde & Formaldehyde Releasers

Formaldehyde and formaldehyde releasers are chemicals sometimes added to cosmetics and personal care products. Formaldehyde and formaldehyde releasers are commonly found in products like:

-  Nail polish
-  Eyelash glue
-  Shampoo
-  Hair gel
-  Hair smoothing treatments

Sometimes, formaldehyde is added directly to cosmetic products. Other times, different chemicals in cosmetics break down to form formaldehyde. These chemicals are called formaldehyde releasers.

Formaldehyde can harm your health

Formaldehyde is a toxic chemical that can be released from cosmetic products into the air we breathe. People using or applying these products can inhale formaldehyde. People using cosmetics with formaldehyde can also be exposed when products are applied directly to the skin or body. Exposure to formaldehyde can lead to:

- Cancer
- Allergies and asthma
- Skin burns and serious eye damage

This is particularly concerning for cosmetologists, their clients, and other people who use these cosmetics frequently.

Why is formaldehyde in cosmetic products?

Formaldehyde and formaldehyde releasers are primarily used in cosmetic products as preservatives or hair-smoothing agents. Hair smoothing treatments are concerning because formaldehyde and formaldehyde releasers are used at high concentrations and heated up. The heat releases formaldehyde into the air where it can be inhaled.

If the product doesn't contact my skin, could I still be exposed?

Exposure can happen from inhalation because formaldehyde is a gas. Keeping a product off you or your client's skin doesn't protect from exposure.

If formaldehyde isn't listed on the ingredients label, could I still be exposed?

You can be exposed to formaldehyde even if it's not on the ingredients label. There are many different chemicals that can release formaldehyde. That means formaldehyde might not be listed on the label but be present in the product. For example, the label may list DMDM Hydantoin, which releases formaldehyde into the product. In other cases, formaldehyde releasers may be added to an ingredient and not directly to the product, and therefore may not appear on the label at all.

How to find products without formaldehyde

- Ask your distributor for products without formaldehyde or formaldehyde releasers.
- Purchase products that have been evaluated by a third-party for presence of toxic chemicals including formaldehyde. Examples include EWG verified, Non-Toxic Black Beauty, and Cradle to Cradle certified.

Contact us

Learn more about our support for cosmetologists switching to safer cosmetics:



Toxic-Free Cosmetics

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Comuníquese con nosotros a ToxicFreeCosmetics@ecy.wa.gov o al 360-338-2913 si usted necesita ayuda con servicios de interpretación o materiales traducidos a otro idioma.

如需翻譯服務或其它語種材料請發送郵件至 ToxicFreeCosmetics@ecy.wa.gov 或撥打電話360-338-2913聯繫我們。

Hãy liên lạc chúng tôi qua điện thư ToxicFreeCosmetics@ecy.wa.gov hoặc gọi 360-338-2913 nếu quý vị cần trợ giúp thông dịch hoặc tài liệu dịch sang tiếng Việt.

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