

Cosmetics Containing Ingredients Linked to Cancer or Reproductive Harm *Executive Summary*

*Data Reported to the
California Safe Cosmetics Program
2009-2015*



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Executive Summary

The term “cosmetics” includes a wide variety of personal care products used by virtually everyone across their lifespan. Cosmetics contain many different chemical ingredients, including some that are known or suspected to cause cancer or reproductive or developmental harm.¹ Cosmetics are minimally regulated by government agencies. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has no authority to require safety testing of cosmetics, and there is no approval process for cosmetics products prior to sale in the U.S.²

The California Safe Cosmetics Program (CSCP) in the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) was created in response to the passage of the California Safe Cosmetics Act (Migden, SB 484; Chapter 729, Statutes of 2005). Manufacturers of cosmetics are required to report to CSCP if they sell products in California and intentionally add ingredients that have been identified by authoritative bodies as known or suspected carcinogens or reproductive or developmental toxicants. Ingredient reporting started in 2009 and, in 2014, CSCP launched its online searchable database³, which provides the public with access to the information reported by cosmetics manufacturers, packers, and distributors. Users can search the database by product name, type of product, brand or company name.

This is the first report from CSCP summarizing the cosmetics product data reported between the launch of the online reporting system in 2009 and the cut-off date for this report (December 17, 2015). The purpose of this report is to share the information that has been collected under the California Safe Cosmetics Act. The report is publicly available for cosmetics companies, organizations or agencies working on chemicals and cosmetics issues, and other interested groups or individuals.

Key findings:

- 77 unique ingredients have been reported in over 57,000 products by almost 500 companies.
- Cosmetics products in 13 different categories of personal care, ranging from beauty products to shaving and baby care products, have been reported to contain ingredients that may cause cancer or reproductive or developmental harm.

¹ Reproductive harm refers to effects related to reproduction, for example, including but not limited to, fertility, fecundity, alterations in reproductive organs, pregnancy complications, endocrine function or hormone levels. Developmental harm refers to effects occurring during prenatal or postnatal development periods, for example, including but not limited to, fetal loss, alterations in sex ratio, altered fetal or postnatal growth, altered gestation length, or structural malformations.

² <http://www.fda.gov/Cosmetics/GuidanceRegulation/LawsRegulations/ucm074162.htm>

³ <https://safecosmetics.cdph.ca.gov/search/>

- The majority of products reported (63%) were makeup. Nail products comprised 13%, skin care products, 8%, and sun-related products, 6%.
- Titanium dioxide, a common ingredient in pigmented products, is by far the most frequently reported ingredient (83%), followed by the anti-aging ingredient retinol/retinyl esters (5.7%), the surfactant cocamide diethanolamine (2.2%), and the preservative butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA, 1.8%).
- Titanium dioxide was listed by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a possible human carcinogen based on sufficient evidence of lung cancer in rats that inhaled airborne particles of titanium dioxide. Although companies reporting to the CSCP may declare the product form (e.g., powder, aerosol, lotion), companies do not routinely report particle size data, and the potential hazard from inhalable titanium dioxide is uncertain.
- Heavy metals (lead, arsenic, cadmium, mercury) are among the hazardous ingredients that have been reported in cosmetics products.
- Not all companies are complying with reporting requirements. The database may not contain all cosmetic products that should be reported under the Safe Cosmetics Act, and it may not contain all reportable ingredients for all reported products; the extent of noncompliance is difficult to assess.
- 14 companies asked to have reportable ingredients publicly listed as a “trade secret.”
- Some cosmetics companies have reported removing ingredients from products since they began reporting to CSCP, although CSCP has not verified the reason for removal. Among companies reporting data to CSCP, 151 companies have removed at least one chemical from a total of 1,784 products.

Manufacturers, packers, and/or distributors of cosmetics are responsible for reporting and updating their own information in the database. The data are limited by incomplete disclosure by some companies, including claims of “trade secret” ingredients, not reporting about ingredients supplied by other companies, and a lack of updating information in the database when products are reformulated. Future efforts of CSCP will include devoting resources to improving the quality of the data in the database through outreach to the cosmetics industry and more frequent data quality audits.

The intention of the Safe Cosmetics Act was to improve access to information about potentially harmful ingredients in cosmetics so that consumers can make informed choices. It was also meant to influence the reformulation of some products toward safer alternatives. Although the reporting requirements apply to carcinogens and reproductive or developmental toxicants rather than all potential toxicants, and there are other important limitations to the data, the CSCP public searchable database serves to identify products that contain known or suspected hazards.