



The Healthy Hair Salon Project

Pollution Prevention In The Hair Salon

Factsheet #1

<https://www.ohccupstate.org/hair%20salon.htm>

The first logical step to deal with unhealthy chemicals in the salon is to replace them with safer ones. Pollution Prevention (sometimes called product substitution) is the process which starts out with asking “Is this healthy for me to use?” But why should you be asking that question in the first place, please read on.

Case Report: A hair salon owner/worker came for a medical evaluation for her ongoing breathing problems to the OHCC. She was found to have severe asthma, especially when she was in the salon. She described a white powder that would appear on surfaces even after cleaning. An industrial hygiene evaluation found a hair relaxing chemical (TGA) formed an irritating organic acid powder (DTGA) in the air. This unusual chemical reaction plus lack of adequate ventilation contributed to her breathing problem. This patient (index case) started the OHCC’s concerns for hair salon workers and evolved into the Healthy Hair Salon Project in the Syracuse NY area.

Hair salon workers health has been researched over many years in the United States and around the globe. The results are summarized below:

What are salon workers Health Concerns?

<p>Skin: It well known that hair salon workers can develop skin reactions to the chemical products used to treat hair. Problems like skin rashes, burns, ulcers, itching, and redness are common. Some workers who have severe skin problems usually leave this type of work due to their skin problems. These reactions can be an allergic and non-allergic type. Clients can also have these reactions to the products used on their hair.</p> <p>Reproductive Problems: Miscarriages, problems becoming pregnant, abnormal menstrual cycle, and birth defects are reported from hair salon workers.</p>	<p>Breathing Problems: More recent research has found breathing problems are common in hair salon workers and may be getting worse. Several years ago it became known that formaldehyde was used in hair straightening products such as Brazilian Blowout for example. Formaldehyde is an industrial chemical used in glues, embalming fluids, and plastics. It is well known that formaldehyde causes skin disease, lung disease, and cancer. Unfortunately, formaldehyde is not the only hazardous chemical used in the hair treatment industry. Therefore, breathing problems such as asthma, sinusitis, coughing, shortness of breath, decrease in lung function etc are found in studies of hair salon workers.</p>
<p>Cancer: As more research is conducted several types of cancer have been reported at increased rates in hair salon workers. These include: lung, bladder, digestive, and breast cancers. For example, a December 2019 National Institute of Health report has confirmed higher breast cancer rates in women who used permanent hair dye and straighteners, with even higher rates in black women. A class of chemicals called endocrine disrupters may be a factor and research continues to determine the cause. A study of endocrine disrupters in the Albany NY area found the highest levels of these chemicals in hair salons.</p>	<p>Other Problems: Because hair salon workers use their hands and stand all day long, this takes a toll on their body parts and can cause joint and muscle disorders. Such issues like carpel tunnel syndrome, back and hip pain are thought to be common in this line of work.</p>

Project Finding: Salon worker/owners in our project reported breathing problems, headaches, dizziness which were worse when in their salons with relief away from the salon.

Factors that may contribute to these far-reaching health problems in hair salon workers include: a lack of preventing toxic chemicals from getting into hair products; a lack of awareness in the industry and workers; no clear solutions to make salons healthier.

Since many chemicals used to treat hair are known to be hazardous, making better choices in selecting products and hair treatment methods should be a priority. For example, these better choices may be 1) using a healthier product; 2) change the hair treatment method; 3) or deciding not to provide a hair treatment method totally.

Product ingredient names can be complicated and confusing to understand. For example, formaldehyde (mentioned above) can have several different names. When Brazilian Blowout received national attention several years ago as having toxic formaldehyde in it, several manufacturers used its other name, methylene glycol, to conceal it from users. Rather than a hid and seek game of chemical names we need stronger regulations to eliminate toxic chemicals from salon chemicals. Until that happens, use the resources listed below to eliminate harmful chemicals by reading the product ingredients list found on the label and Safety Data Sheet (SDS) before buying the product.

The Healthy Hair Salon Project found several products in common use during the salon survey part of the project. These include:

Product	Chemical	Health Effects
Caustic Hair Relaxers	sodium hydroxide (lye)	skin burns
TGA Hair Relaxers	DTGA (an organic acid)	breathing irritant / possible asthma
Flat Iron Sprays	Cyclomethicone (releases formaldehyde when heated)	breathing problems / cancer

If you or your co-workers are feeling ill and you think the salon environment might be the cause consider:

- Talking to each other and bring your concerns to the owner (share this factsheet).
- Read the SDS (on file in the salon) for the products you are using to see if your health concerns are listed. Search for information on the internet for the ingredients.
- Have co-workers and owner commit to the Healthy Hair Salon Model.

Because of the current lack of adequate regulations to keep harmful chemicals out of the products used in salons, it is difficult to find healthier ones to use. Until adequate regulations are in place and enforced, start with the list of 18 harmful chemicals in the [Toxic Chemicals In Salon Products](https://www.womensvoices.org/avoid-toxic-chemicals/salon-products/toxic-chemicals-in-salon-products-workers/) factsheet by the Women’s Voices organization <https://www.womensvoices.org/avoid-toxic-chemicals/salon-products/toxic-chemicals-in-salon-products-workers/>

Additional information can be found in The Beauty and the Beast Report

<https://www.womensvoices.org/safe-salons/beauty-and-its-beast/beauty-and-its-beast-fact-sheet/>



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