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Women's Voices for the Earth

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LEADING NAIL POLISH MANUFACTURER REMOVES TOXIC INGREDIENTS

Report Finds Regulations Still Needed For Health And Safety Of Salon Workers

MISSOULA, MT- Facing pressure from consumers as well as health and environmental groups, top nail polish manufacturer OPI Products, Inc. announced that it has begun removing toluene, a hazardous solvent, from their products, on the heels of an announcement last spring that it would remove dibutyl phthalate (DBP) from their products. The victory was announced alongside the release of a report, "Glossed Over: Health Hazards Associated with Toxic Exposure in Nail Salons," which reveals that these and other chemicals commonly found in nail care and cosmetic products applied at home or in nail salons are linked to cancer, birth defects, and other health issues, generating concern for the largely Vietnamese nail salon worker population given their long-term and chronic exposure to these products.

On March 12, Women's Voices for the Earth, a national women's environmental health organization, and eleven other environmental and health groups requested that OPI, the leading supplier of products to U.S. nail salons, remove the hazardous chemicals, toluene and formaldehyde, from its products. OPI responded immediately with a letter detailing that it plans to phase out toluene from all of its products within the next few months. While OPI does not use formaldehyde in its nail polishes, it remains an ingredient in some of their nail hardeners. OPI claims it is searching for alternatives for its use of formaldehyde in hardeners, but made no commitment on this issue. OPI does manufacture a formaldehyde-free version of their nail hardener as well.

"We are pleased that recent technological advances have enabled us to improve our formulas and to harmonize our product offerings so that we now have single global formulas for our nail care products, rather than different offerings in different markets," wrote Eric Schwartz, COO of Los Angeles based OPI Products, in a letter to Women's Voices for the Earth, dated March 15. Please visit www.womenandenvironment.org to download copies of the letters to and from OPI.

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“This recent move is an example of the good faith efforts of manufacturers in removing toxic ingredients in response to consumer and community based activism,” said Alexandra Gorman, Director of Science and Research at Women’s Voices for the Earth. “This is good news for women everywhere and especially for nail salon workers who work with these products day in and day out.”

While companies such as OPI and leading drug store brand Sally Hansen have voluntarily decided to remove these chemicals from their products, no legal enforcement exists yet for other manufacturers of nail care products and cosmetics who use hazardous chemicals in their products. Women’s Voices for the Earth says the federal government needs to develop comprehensive regulation of the chemicals in nail care products to protect the health of nail salon workers who are continually exposed.

The “Glossed Over” report, released today by Women’s Voices for the Earth, outlines this need for regulatory measures to ensure the health and safety of nail salon workers. The report cites the main health concerns associated with long-term exposure to nail care products at nail salons and recommends improving conditions for nail salon employees and customers by increasing proper ventilation around work areas and providing bilingual advisory information to owners and workers. The report is available in English at www.womenandenvironment.org. A Vietnamese version of the report will be available in April.

As “Glossed Over” notes, the FDA does not review or approve nail care and cosmetic products before they go on the market. Instead the FDA relies on its Cosmetics Voluntary Registration Program, which allows cosmetics manufacturers to voluntarily report to the FDA adverse reactions to their products. California, however, has moved forward by passing legislation to better inform the public about hazardous chemicals in nail care and cosmetics products. The effort is spearheaded by California Senator Carole Migden of San Francisco.

"This report illustrates why my legislation, SB 484, is such an important step in protecting the health and safety of nail salon workers and consumers. SB 484 became California law this year, requiring cosmetics manufacturers to notify the state if their products contain carcinogens," said Senator Migden. "Unfortunately there is nothing like it in the rest of the U.S. that kick-starts the process of removing carcinogens and toxins from nail products and cosmetics. We still have a long way to go to ensure that cosmetics manufacturers are held accountable for doing their part to protect the health and safety of workers and consumers."

All three chemicals – DBP, toluene and formaldehyde – are on California's Prop. 65 list of chemicals known to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity. Studies have linked DBP to underdeveloped genitals and other reproductive system problems in newborn boys. DBP is banned from nail care and cosmetics products in the European Union but the FDA has taken no such action in the United States.

In addition, the U.S. National Toxicology Program says formaldehyde is "reasonably anticipated" to be a human carcinogen. The EPA, meanwhile, restricts toluene in drinking water because it can cause nervous system disorders and damage the liver and kidneys.

Women of childbearing age are especially vulnerable to even low levels of toxic exposure, due to the potential impacts on a developing child. Some Vietnamese nail salon workers report that they simply quit their jobs when they get pregnant to avoid health impacts from their chronic exposure to the toxic chemicals present in the products that they handle on a daily basis.

“At Women’s Voices for the Earth, we work to improve the environmental health of all women. When companies like OPI take the toxic chemicals out of their products, all women can begin to breathe easier. It is a great first step along a path towards real change in the industry” says Alexandra Gorman, Director of Science and Research at Women’s Voices for the Earth.

OPI had been a target of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, (www.safecosmetics.org) of which Women’s Voices for the Earth is a founding member, since a March 2006 meeting between company executives and Campaign representatives. In that meeting OPI refused to remove formaldehyde, toluene and DBP from products.

Since then, OPI has been the object of more than 75 protests organized by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics in dozens of cities, including Boston, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco and Washington. Those were quickly followed by a "Miss Treatment USA" advertising campaign that spoofed the brand's quirky shade names. The letter from OPI represents one of the most detailed responses from a company that the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics has seen to date in its campaign to get cosmetic companies to “clean up” their product lines.

The organizations who co-signed Women’s Voices for the Earth’s letter to OPI are: National Asian Pacific Women’s Forum, Asian Law Caucus, Asian Health Services, Clean New York, Coalition for Clean Air, Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA), Capital Region Action Against Breast Cancer (CRAAB), Environmental Coalition of South Seattle, Great Neck Breast Cancer Coalition, Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition, Inc. and Prevention is the Cure, Inc.

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