

COMING CLEAN

• *A Campaign to Establish Strict Organic Standards for Body Care Products* •

Organic Consumers Association's new campaign, "Coming Clean," is working to have organic body care products covered under the same rigorous labeling and production standards that are now in place for organic foods.

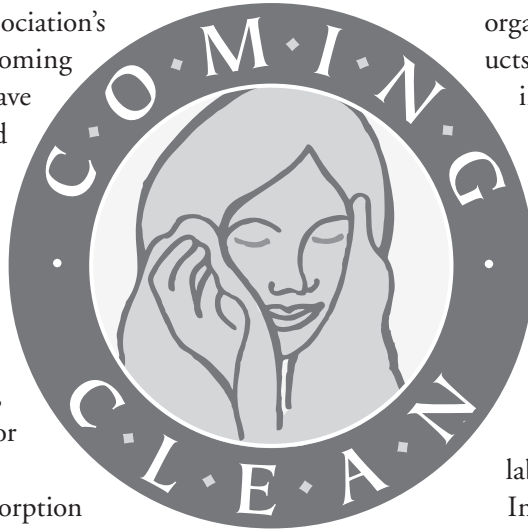
Scientists and medical practitioners warn of the impact of substances absorbed through the skin—whether it's soap, shampoo, cosmetics, suntan oil, or lotions for babies and children.

This process of direct absorption through the skin and capillaries into the body is particularly important, because it completely bypasses the kidneys and liver, which normally filter out toxins. The ability of skin to serve as a direct and unfiltered "gateway" into the bloodstream is exactly why nicotine patches and other medicinal surfactants are so effective.

Consumers who are already seeking out organic food also want organic body care products. They look to the organic label to insure "least problematic", safest, and most pure products available. Body care companies, capitalizing on this consumer concern, have started labeling some of their products "organic," too, but it is not always clear what that means.

Many of the leading brand name products in the body care and cosmetics marketplace currently labeled "organic" are composed mostly of "organic" flowered water, often containing insignificant amounts of organic ingredients other than these waters. In addition, a number of these products contain petroleum-based ingredients which can contain trace toxic contaminants.

Compounding the problem, various companies and interests in the "natural" products industry are pressuring a task force of the Organic Trade Association (OTA) to formulate proposed federal



organic standards for body care products that could seriously undermine the integrity of the organic label.

These compromised standards, if enacted, would allow companies to simply add "organic" perfumed water to the same synthetic cleansers, conditioners, and preservatives found in mainstream products. If the "organic water" is 70% of the content, the product could then legally be labeled "70% organic."

In response to this outrage, Organic Consumers Association (OCA) launched its "Coming Clean" campaign in March 2003.

The OCA believes that the only real solutions to this problem involve public education, marketplace pressure, and network building—as well as possible litigation and legislative action. Either we must convince the OTA and the US Department of Agriculture National Organic Program (NOP) to resist pressure from "natural" companies attempting to water down organic standards, or the organic community will have to develop and popularize an appropriate third-party certified "Eco-Label" which meets the traditional standards of organic integrity.

We must begin to educate ourselves to identify and avoid problematic and potentially hazardous products and ingredients already sold in the marketplace. We should also make certain that Fair Trade

practices, validated either by third party organic or Fair Trade certifiers, permeate the entire chain of production and marketing of body care products labeled as organic.

For further information on OCA's Coming Clean campaign, see our website at www.organicconsumers.org/bodycare/

If you would like to get involved in the Coming Clean campaign, please contact the OCA national office.



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DON'T WATER DOWN ORGANIC STANDARDS FOR BODY CARE!

THE PROBLEM

A number of body care product companies are counting non-agricultural water as organic, to greenwash their products and make organic label claims, even though their formulations are largely composed of the synthetic cleansers, conditioners and preservatives found in mainstream products. This fraud is destroying the integrity of the organic label.

FLORAL WATER

Floral waters (or hydrosols) are the water by-product of essential oil steam distillation and are basically a complicated way of making tea. Companies making body care products based on synthetic surfactants (detergents or wetting agents) front-load their ingredient list with floral waters and water extracts/infusions. The names of the synthetic surfactants that actually make up the product are buried further down the list. These waters are claimed to be key functional organic components but are, in the context of the whole product, inconsequential.

CORE INGREDIENTS

The core ingredients in these products often include one or more of the following:

Olefin Sulfonate is a surfactant, derived entirely from petroleum, and has no place in an organic product.

Cocoamidopropyl Betaine uses a petroleum intermediate in building the surfactant.

Ethoxylated surfactants like **Sodium Myreth Sulfate** use petroleum-derived ethylene oxide to ethoxylate alcohol sulfates which can produce 1,4 dioxane, a toxic material, in trace quantities.

Paraben preservatives are also petroleum-derived.

THE SOLUTION

Organic Consumers Association believes that body care ingredients and products should only be labeled organic if:

Certified organic agricultural feed-stocks (raw materials) are used exclusively, rather than petroleum or conventional vegetable feed-stocks, in the manufacture of key ingredients.

The manufacture of these ingredients is reasonably simple and ecological.

The toxicity of each ingredient is minimal.

Non-agricultural water is not counted as contributing to organic content. (Agricultural water is the naturally occurring water in a plant.)

70% ORGANIC?

Even though organic floral water/hydrosol is over 99% non-agricultural water, this water is counted as "organic". This practice drastically inflates the weight of organic ingredients, to make the claim "70% Certified Organic Ingredients." However, organic regulations stipulate that only the non-water weight of a product is counted when determining organic content. A soup company cannot replace regular water in a conventional vegetable soup product with "organic rosemary water" and then claim the soup is "70% Organic" without organically sourcing any of the vegetable ingredients.



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