


# EXPOSED: Ingredients in Salon Products and Salon Worker Health and Safety

An analysis of chemicals of concern in professional hair and nail salon products, and manufacturer compliance with California cosmetic ingredient disclosure laws.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A dark silhouette of a person's head and shoulders is on the left. In the foreground, there is a large, rounded, light-colored bottle with a dark cap. To the left of the bottle, a brush or applicator is shown dripping a dark liquid. The background is a gradient of light to dark.

Professional hair and nail salon workers are exposed to chemical ingredients in the products they use every day. The ingredients are breathed in the air and absorbed through the skin, entering the body where they can affect salon worker health. For far too long, manufacturers have been legally allowed to keep these chemical ingredients a secret from their customers, denying salon workers a full understanding of their exposures. Recently, however, the laws have changed – first in California, and now nationally – requiring product manufacturers to list professional salon product ingredients on the package label, as has been required for retail cosmetics since 1938. In addition to these disclosure requirements, another new law enacted in California requires all cosmetic products (both professional and retail) to report toxic fragrance and flavor ingredients to the California Safe Cosmetic Program, where they are then disclosed via a public database. Salon workers, advocates and researchers can now better understand chemical exposures in the salon and act on that knowledge. The increase in ingredient transparency is also a first step to the development of safer and healthier products.

This report reviewed a snapshot of certain professional salon products currently available in California beauty supply stores to investigate how well manufacturers are complying with these new laws, to help identify important ingredient and disclosure trends, and to further emphasize what we now know about chemicals found in these professional products.

Salon workers are especially vulnerable to toxic exposures in the salon. They work day in and day out with salon products, accumulating significantly more exposure than the average user of cosmetic products. Salon workers are predominately a workforce of women, people of color and are often low-income – meaning the exposure to toxic chemicals in the salon workplace compounds the myriad of other threats to their health they already face related directly to gender, race, economic status, access to quality healthcare, and more. As a result, studies show that salon workers suffer from significantly higher rates of disease and chronic health conditions such as asthma, skin conditions, pregnancy complications and some types of cancer compared to other occupations. Urgent action is needed to prevent these negative health outcomes, many of which are avoidable – starting with ensuring that professional salon products are safe and healthy for salon workers to use.

Our investigation discovered that professional salon products still largely contain ingredients that have been documented as hazardous to salon workers for decades. We identified very little innovation in the salon product industry to replace hazardous chemicals with inherently safer alternatives. Instead, we noted that in many cases, where hazardous chemicals were included in products, the manufacturers included unrealistic safety instructions for users. The safety instructions suggest avoiding exposure to the products (like inhalation or contact with skin) where this would be nearly impossible to accomplish. This unfairly puts the onus for safety on the salon worker, rather than on the manufacturer who is responsible for making products that are safe to use. In addition, we identified products and product categories where ingredient disclosure remains inadequate or absent altogether.

## Key Findings:

- Hazardous chemicals are found in professional salon products that harm lungs, cause allergic skin reactions and are linked to reproductive harm and cancer.
- Despite decades of warnings about these chemicals from public health officials, and known harm to salon workers, very little innovation toward safer chemistry is evident in the professional salon product industry.
- The few harmful ingredients that have been removed from products have been replaced with regrettable substitutes.
- Manufacturers frequently provide product safety instructions that make it near impossible to use products in a way that avoids harm.
- Despite new laws requiring ingredient disclosure, some salon products are still sold without ingredient listings on the label.

## Conclusion:

Securing the right-to-know what ingredients are used in products is an important first step to transforming the salon product industry toward a healthier and more sustainable future. As a result of new laws we are learning more about the prevalence of harmful ingredients that are used in salon products than ever before. We hope this information will give salon workers greater ability to avoid certain ingredients or products that may harm their health and to advocate for safer and healthier workplaces. It is time to demand greater accountability from the salon product industry to manufacture products that are less toxic. Innovation of inherently safer chemical ingredients is well overdue. The salon product industry must ensure that the products they make will no longer harm the health of salon workers. Safer and healthier products will clearly benefit both salon workers and their clients alike.

