

Natural and Organic Cosmetics Mislabeled

Buyer Beware

The past several years has seen an unprecedented expansion of the natural and organic cosmetic market. There are now a myriad of publications devoted to this topic. One can not open a professional journal, mass market magazine or even turn on the television without hearing the words natural, organic and green.

The State of California, through its Attorney General, has filed a lawsuit against a number of personal care companies that claim to be natural and/or organic either in name, product descriptions or advertisements. This is important for many reasons; not the least of which is what happens in California often spreads to other parts of the country and even the Federal government. This is not the first time this issue has arisen in California. A company headed by David Bonner filed a lawsuit in state superior court against a number of leading organic and natural brands along with several “certification organizations” regarding mislabeling of products.

Essentially, it is alleged by the Attorney General that many of the natural personal care companies products contain levels of carcinogenic compounds including 1,4-Dioxane. California Proposition 65 states that consumer products that contain chemicals known to the state to cause reproductive problems or cancer must give clear and reasonable warning to consumers. This is akin to the early warnings that started to appear in cigarette advertising many years ago. Today, those warnings about the dangers of smoking are more sharply worded.

The Organic Consumers Association (www.organicconsumers.org) has brought this issue to the forefront as a result of a study it released in 2008. They have been campaigning to pull the curtain back on a number of natural and organic brands that were found to contain compounds and ingredients that are anything but natural or organic. Also of concern was ethylene oxide often used as a surfactant. Surfactants are wetting agents that lower the surface tension of a liquid, allowing easier spreading, and lowering the interfacial tensions between two liquids. Simply put, making it easier liquids like water and oil to mix.

It is important to note that the FDA has a differing point of view. It states that 1, 4-dioxane does not pose a risk to consumers as it is found in a myriad of cosmetic products.

This is certainly not the first nor will it be the last when a state regulatory body is at odds with the FDA over health and safety issues. This only adds confusion to an already conflicting situation.

We would be remiss if we did not point out that the issue of toxicity or potential health hazard is in reality based more on the concentration and dosage of an ingredient rather than the ingredient itself. A minisule amount may be safe while a large amount is harmful.

A word of caution, just because someone uses the term organic or natural does not mean the product is what it calims to be nor is it fair to say products that may contain chemical or synthized ingredients are not more effective and equally safe. Again, it is more about the amount of an ingredient rather than the ingredient itself. Do not be swayed by uninformed beliefs - educate yourself and your cleints/pateints.

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