



JULY 2, 2010

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Founder and Director, Organic Consumers Association

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The Oil Spill in the Bathroom

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There's an oil spill in U.S. bathrooms that's roughly the same size as the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. It's coming from the petrochemical-based cosmetics we're rubbing into our hair and skin and rinsing down the drain. U.S. oil addiction isn't limited to the fuel in our cars. If you know what to look for, you'll find it everywhere, even in the grocery store's health and beauty aisle.

Up to 40,000 barrels of oil have been pouring into the Gulf of Mexico each day since the Deepwater Horizon oil rig blew up and killed 11 BP workers on April 20. With U.S. liquid fuel consumption at about 20 million barrels a day, that's about 4 percent of U.S. oil consumption poisoning the oceans and washing up on our beaches every day. Coincidentally, that's also the same amount of [U.S. daily oil consumption](#) that is used to produce the petrochemicals common in conventional cosmetics.

Does it take a catastrophe like the BP oil spill to remind us of the pressing need to cut our oil consumption? Are people finally outraged enough to stop using petrochemicals to bathe and beautify? Would you be willing to switch to organic cosmetics to save a sea turtle, keep our drinking water safe, and our beaches beautiful?

If you're ready to make the switch, it's important to know that it isn't as easy to shop for organic cosmetics as it is for organic food (another good way to cut your oil consumption, as most conventional fertilizers and pesticides are made with fossil fuels).

The USDA's National Organic Program protects consumers from false organic claims on food. Only foods that are third-party certified to the USDA's organic standards can be advertised as organic.

Not so with non-food products. The USDA allows health and beauty products to be certified to USDA organic standards, but it doesn't require all products that are marketed as organic to be certified.

The result is that organic integrity varies from aisle to aisle in the grocery store. When shopping for health and beauty products, shoppers are bombarded with organic claims on products that aren't actually certified organic. Unless the product is certified organic, it's almost impossible to tell what percentage of the ingredients are organic and which ingredients are synthetic, petroleum-

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derived or dangerous. And, as our tests for 1,4 dioxane have shown, the petroleum-based formulations of some mislabeled "organic" products can even produce hidden toxins that don't appear on the label.

On a recent visit to Whole Foods, I found scores of brands with products that are advertised as organic but not certified. But, by June 1, 2011, Whole Foods will require these products to either be third-party certified to USDA organic standards or stop making front-label organic claims. That's the result of a newly revised Whole Foods policy announced June 8, 2010, "Whole Foods Market's policy on the use of the word "organic" on personal care products." The Organic Consumers Association is calling on retailers to follow Whole Foods' lead, but responsibility to crack down on organic cheaters ultimately rests with government regulators at the USDA's National Organic Program.

In the meantime, consumers can avoid petroleum-derived ingredients by shopping for products with the "USDA Organic" seal.

Petroleum-derived cosmetics ingredients are common uncertified "organic" products.

"Ceteareth-20," a compound obtained from fatty acids and the petrochemical ethylene oxide, is in "Nature's Gate Organics" lotion.

"Cocamidopropyl Betaine," derived from coconut using petrochemicals, is in "Avalon Organics" shampoo.

"Ethylhexylglycerin," a synthetic petrochemical preservative, is in "Organic Grooming" deodorant.

"Fragrance," a proprietary mix of ingredients that often includes petroleum-based synthetics, but doesn't have to be disclosed on the label, is in "Nature's Gate Organics" shave cream.

"Phenoxyethanol", derived from phenol and ethylene oxide, is in "Giovanni Organic" conditioner.

"Polyethylene Glycol (PEG)," made from ethylene oxide, glucose and fatty acids, is in "Nature's Gate Organics" shampoo.

"Olefin Sulfonate," derived from benzene, is in "Kiss My Face" shampoo with the brand's own "Certified Organic Botanicals" seal.

"Sodium Myreth Sulfate," made with ethylene oxide, is in "Rainbow Organic" bubble bath.

All of these products can be replaced with petrochemical-free, certified organic alternatives that work just as well. I recommend trying hair care, skin creams, shaving gels and deodorants by Dr. Bronner's, Intelligent Nutrients, Nature's Paradise, Nourish, Organic Essence, and Terressentials. (You'll have to make your own organic bubble bath, but you'll find lots of easy recipes on the Internet.)

Avoid petrochemical ingredients and buy certified organic cosmetics to get the oil spill in your bathroom under control.

Learn more at <http://organicconsumers.org/bodycare/index.cfm>

Follow Ronnie Cummins on Twitter: www.twitter.com/OrganicConsumer

The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter search page. At the top, the Twitter logo is on the left, and a search bar with the text "oil spill" and a magnifying glass icon is on the right. Below the search bar, the text "Loading..." is displayed. At the bottom of the page, there are several links: "Justin Bieber, Sting to Headline Larry King's Oil Spill Telethon - ABC News", "Login | Facebook", and "Watch FIFA Online | Watch FIFA Online FREE | Watch FIFA Online Your Computer - W...".



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micalee 01:14 PM on 6/19/2010

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When I was younger, and had less financial responsibilities, I bought all natural. Now I can't afford to. It's a shame that buying organic and all natural is so expensive. When you can buy conditioner for less than two dollars, why would you get the \$12 or \$25 conditioner? I'm not there yet, though I'd like to be, and certainly there's a large portion of the country that shop at Walmart because that's what they can afford. I do buy all natural make-up, because, in the end, the prices are comparable.

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MoLove 01:18 PM on 6/17/2010

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Such important information. Here's a great short video about the cosmetics industry: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQYxkMVexo0>

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kristiatchoosewiser 09:37 AM on 6/17/2010

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So I understand petroleum usage, and I understand organic versus synthetic, but dangerous? Toxic? Who is protecting us here? Mr. Cummins, is that covered in the organic consumers association as well? Can you do a piece on the Dangerous part you referred to?

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cecileyhilda 06:59 AM on 6/17/2010

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yeah that is true, major brands do give out free samples of their popular health products best place to get yours is <http://bit.ly/bhhLUy> tell your friends and family too

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