



The facts about... chemicals

The Cosmetic, Toiletry & Perfumery Association (CTPA) held its first Media Panel event of the year on 23rd February with the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). It marked the latest event in its series of regular knowledge-sharing sessions with health and beauty journalists, designed to provide key insights into topical issues and access to leading experts. This time, the hot topic was chemicals in consumers' everyday products, with a special focus on cosmetics and personal care products.

This factsheet features extracts from presentations given at the event by the two keynote speakers:

- * Dr Richard Pike, a Chartered Scientist, Chartered Engineer and the Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Chemistry, an independent and learned body that promotes the science of chemistry
- * Dr Chris Flower, a Chartered Biologist with MSc and PhD degrees in toxicology and the Director-General of the CTPA, the public voice of the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Industry in the UK

What are chemicals?

Everything in the known universe is made up of chemicals. Chemicals are even the building blocks of life. Whether those chemicals are natural or man-made, they all obey the same laws. Humans, the plants and animals around us, the very earth itself and the stars and planets are all composed 100% of chemicals.



Confusion about chemicals

Despite their essential role in our lives, there is widespread public confusion about chemicals, in particular an unfortunate tendency to think of the word 'chemical' as synonymous with 'unsafe'. New research by YouGov, commissioned by the CTPA, suggests that 84% of consumers feel some level of concern about the potential impact of the chemicals in their everyday products on their health¹.



The 'chemical-free' truth

Dr Richard Pike, Chief Executive of the RSC, spoke of how mis-leading product claims which feature the impossible term "chemical-free" could be fuelling consumers' fears: "If products are marketed as 'chemical-free' as though that's not only possible, but actually desirable, it's no wonder some consumers might feel concerned about the safety of chemicals. The truth, as any right-minded person will say, is that everything we eat, drink, drive, play with and live in is made of chemicals - both natural and synthetic chemicals are essential for life as we know it."



Natural vs. synthetic

Another widely held misconception is the idea that natural chemicals are safe, while man-made ones are not. In fact, whether ingredients are natural or man-made has no bearing on how safe they are at all. Instead, of key importance are the properties of the chemical as well as how much of it you are using and in what way you are using it. Any substance has the potential to be harmful if used in the wrong way, even water; too much or too little can cause severe harm.



¹ Survey carried out by YouGov among 2035 GB adults, aged 18+, 17th February to 19th February 2010. Respondents were asked to rate how concerned they were about the potential impact of the chemicals in their everyday products (including cosmetics, toiletries and food) on their health: 11% rated themselves as "very concerned"; 34% as fairly concerned; 40% as "not very concerned"; 12% as "not concerned at all"; 3% stated they didn't know



Countering the confusion

The Royal Society of Chemistry is taking a lead in calling for greater education in the sciences, especially chemistry. Industry can also play an important part in this education process. To this end, the CTPA has just announced the launch of a collaborative new initiative to address public confusion and anxiety surrounding the role and application of chemicals in daily life.

Facts About Chemicals: Cross-industry collaboration

Facts About Chemicals is a new online information resource housed on the CTPA's consumer website, www.thefactsabout.co.uk, which aims to answer the public's top questions about chemicals in cosmetics and personal care products with science-based facts from a range of industries and organisations, including:

- * The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) – which has supplied a foreword to the resource
- * The British Association of Dermatologists (BAD)
- * The British Fragrance Association (BFA)
- * Sense About Science (SAS)
- * The UK Cleaning Products Industry Association (UKCPI)

“The CTPA's new initiative will help to reduce some of the confusion about chemicals so that people can make better-informed decisions and choices in their daily lives. Any measures industry can take to promote a more science-based understanding of chemicals, and the very positive role they play in our everyday lives, can only be a good thing.”

Dr Richard Pike, CEO, Royal Society of Chemistry

“With hundreds of sites promoting so-called safer, chemical-free products, we felt it was important to provide an online source of scientific facts about the safety of chemicals.”

Dr Chris Flower, Director-General, CTPA

Below is just one of the common questions covered by Facts About Chemicals:

Q. Can ingredients from everyday products build up in the body over time to reach unsafe levels?

A. Sense About Science says: “There are now frequent scares about the presence of a variety of man-made chemicals in our bodies, particularly in relation to press releases from campaign groups testing the excretions and tissue of celebrities and other groups. Out of context, these announcements sound alarming, but there are three vital pieces of information in such discussions:

- a) The concentration of the chemical: we can detect some chemicals in the body in parts per billion. A part per billion is equivalent to one grain of sugar in an Olympic-sized swimming pool.
- b) The fact that our bodies are able to process and excrete harmful substances.
- c) The presence of a chemical in our bodies does not mean it is doing harm. Our bodies contain traces of many substances that we are in contact with, both natural and synthetic.”

For answers to more common questions about chemicals, visit the new **Facts About Chemicals** section at www.thefactsabout.co.uk/chemicals



For further information, please contact Eleanor O'Connor at CTPA on 020 7491 8891 or e-mail eoconnor@ctpa.org.uk
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