

## “Greenwashing”. Just How Green are those Cosmetics?

*You spent ages tracking it down, and it cost twice what you're used to spending! You're told it's a better quality, natural and green so it's worth it. Or is it?*

Greenwashing is the phrase resulting from the marketing of products claiming to be green (i.e.: earth friendly, natural, fully biodegradable) when they are not. And it's amazing the number of high profile 'green' brands that either greenwash themselves or have the media do it for them!

Using 100 % natural ingredients does cost a manufacturer more than using the synthetic equivalents. Yet many customers are deceived into paying much more than they should for seemingly all-natural products but which in fact have hidden synthetics. Like actors, the natural, healthy ingredients are given the star status headline, while the synthetics are like movie extras – in tiny print on the bottom.

Sometimes so little of the certified organic ingredient or mineral is added that it is quite ineffectual. Or the foundation's description of “pure” minerals implying ‘only minerals and nothing else’ is conveniently ambiguous. Perhaps the minerals *were* pure initially, but before they added the bismuth or the parabens!

Some of the best known brands that promote themselves as natural, healthy and pure use synthetic fillers, foaming agents etc in many or all the products to maximise profits. While perhaps slightly healthier than regular cosmetics, they offer reduced positive impact on the health and environment, especially given the implications of the synthetics' manufacture, usage and eventual deposit in our waterways and food chain. Of course these companies do deserve to make a profit; but the deception their profit is based on is what's questionable.

How can your green cosmetic turn out to be a little on the grey side? While there are strict guidelines for the words that can and can't be used in advertising, there is still plenty of room for ambiguity. So you have to rely on the FULL ingredients list; a list of key or active ingredients is usually a sign that they don't want you to know what else is in it!

Organic is a word frequently used and abused in greenwashing. Organic matter is derived from living organisms - plants and animals – but there is no guarantee that they have not been contaminated by pesticides or drugs, and the cosmetic companies frequently add synthetic chemicals. Certified Organic is what you should be looking for. It refers to an agricultural method that has been audited and verified as being free of pesticides, drugs, hormones, or synthetic chemicals. Many natural and safe ingredients are not of organic origin such as water and minerals. (Which are mined)

Suggesting that some synthetics are absolutely necessary is more of an opinion than fact. Sure some hair products style and hold hair more firmly with them, but do all of us need the level of hold for a 10cm spike of hair to remain vertical all day in the rain? Most products are all used up well before their natural preservatives expire, especially when not packaged in jumbo containers designed to increase our spend at the counter.

So what if your skin's not 'sensitive' or you think that cosmetics ingredients have little impact?

Consider this...skin feeds directly and up to 60% of what you apply daily is absorbed ( deodorant, perfume, moisturiser, mouthwash, hand cream etc) or swallowed (lipgloss, lipstick and balms) Autopsies reveal organs store up to several hundred different synthetic chemicals because the body is unable to process them like food and excrete them. The remaining 40% we later wash off; it goes into the waterways, impacting on flora, fauna and the food chain.

The good news....there are actually many completely green cosmetics. And Australia is home to a large and growing number of cosmetic brands that are 100% natural and safe, as effective if not more so than their mainstream equivalent, completely affordable on a cost per use basis and in many instances packaged beautifully. But you probably haven't heard of half of them. Many of these brands are small and new, while some prefer to keep their expenditure on advertising down to keep the product prices down.

While media and retailers want to say that they recognised / launched a hot new product first, few want to be the first to actually take any risks so they'll stick to the big name brands that consumers know, despite the products being greenwashed. These entrepreneurs should be given maximum support in view of how much we now know of the benefits of natural ingredients and sustainable production, and the dire consequences otherwise!

It is clear that the big brands recognise that customers want green and natural products as increasingly more of them jump on the organic and mineral bandwagon. Retailers and customers must become better informed, demand and purchase brands that *really* offer 'green' products.

Learn an ingredient a week and read the labels. It's the only way to tell if the product really is what it claims. Change your brands, ask retailers to do the same. Eventually everyone wins...after all, what's the use of a five year shelf life when our skin's too irritated to use it and our drinking water is too loaded with synthetics to drink.

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