

News Consumer Safety

Hundreds of personal care products contain untested, unapproved nano-scale ingredients that may pose consumer safety concerns

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(NewsTarget) A computer analysis of 25,000 personal care product labels -- conducted by non-profit research organization, the Environmental Working Group -- found that hundreds of the products contain nano-sized or micronized materials, which can be very hazardous and unpredictable, according to the FDA.

Nano-materials' small size and exceptionally high surface area to volume ratio can produce chemical or physical properties that are vastly different from their larger counterparts. The analysis showed that more than 250 of the analyzed personal care products contain one or more of 57 different nano-scale ingredients that were identified on the labels, and another 9,500 contained ingredients that could be either nano- or conventional-sized, but were not clearly identified one way or the other.

Without a clear government definition for nano-sized materials, quantifying how much is present in any given personal care product is difficult, stated a news release at the EWG website, ewg.org. Neither the FDA nor the Cosmetic Ingredient Review Expert Panel (CIR) has substantiated the safety of nano-scale materials, which means cosmetics manufacturers do not have to divulge the science supporting the safety of the materials to either the FDA or consumers. It is standard to rely on the CIR to assess the safety of ingredients, but the EWG release noted that the panel had not assessed a single nano-material, and had only reviewed 11 percent of conventional cosmetic ingredients.

"The industry may have the studies to support the safety of these nano-materials, but they are not required to make any of this information available to the public," said Jane Houlihan, vice president for research at EWG, and author of the assessment. "Manufacturers seem to be following the pattern they established with conventional chemical ingredients: Put poorly tested chemicals into personal care products and do the science later if at all."

In response to the safety issues raised by the lack of safety definitions for nano-materials, the EWG is calling for the FDA to:

-- "Define, through a public process, what substantiation of safety means for nano-materials. Require industry to make public all of the studies it has substantiating the claim that products containing nano-materials are safe." -- "Identify the presence of nano-materials in all products."

-- "Request information on particle size from all personal care product manufacturers."

A list of nano-materials and micronized ingredients, as well as the products that contain them, can be found at www.ewg.org.