

Scent Of Danger

The hidden threats lurking in synthetic fragrances and indoor air fresheners

Facts:

- As many as 50 million people in the United States suffer from allergic diseases (AAAAI)
- In 1998, it was estimated that 26.3 million Americans have been diagnosed with asthma in their lifetime (ALA of Texas). Up to 72% of asthmatics report their asthma is triggered by fragrance.
- Approximately 12.6% of the population suffers from multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), a condition in which they experience reactions from exposure to low concentrations of common chemicals..." (Adams).
- The Institute of Medicine placed fragrance in the same category as second hand smoke in triggering asthma in adults and school age children.
- Air "fresheners," according to the Household Hazardous Waste Project, do not freshen the air at all. What they do is mask one odor with another, while diminishing one's sense of smell with a nerve-deadening agent.
- Perfumes, colognes, and many other *scented* products contain an abundance of harmful chemicals, many of which are listed on the EPA's Hazardous Waste List. They also include numerous carcinogenic chemicals, neurotoxins, respiratory irritants, solvents, aldehydes, hundreds of untested and unregulated petrochemicals, phthalates (which can act as hormone disrupters), narcotics, and much more. Many of these substances have been linked to cancer, birth defects, central nervous system disorders and allergic reactions.
- Synthetic fragrances are not regulated by any government agency. Fragrance formulas are considered "trade secrets," a designation that gives companies the legal right not to disclose ingredients, even to the FDA. The result? The same chemicals that must be disclosed and tested when used in gasoline and cigarettes go unregulated when put into a bottle of shampoo.



Resources:

The Cleaner Air Campaign:
www.cleanerindoorair.org

Chemical Body Burden
www.chemicalbodyburden.org

MCS-Awareness.org
www.mcs-awareness.org

Is Your Home Making People Sick?
www.MyIDA.org/zone.htm

Air Quality Sciences Resource Center
www.aeris.org

Greenguard Environmental Institute
www.greenguard.org

Fragranced Product Information Network
www.fpinva.org



De-Scents-itize Your Home: Alternatives to synthetic fragrances

Air Fresheners: Instead of masking odors, identify and remove the source. Take shoes off at the door, and empty the trash often. Use cedar blocks, or simmer cinnamon sticks, cloves or allspice for natural fragrances.

Cleaning products: The most inexpensive and safe cleansers are baking soda and water for deodorizing.

Essential oils and incense: A good alternative to synthetic scents, essential oils can be placed around the house, worn as perfume, or used in cleaning products. Don't assume all incense is safe; it has combustible materials, and may include contaminants and artificial fragrances.

"Although most parents today wouldn't dream of allowing their kids to be in a room full of cigarette smoke, they expose them to equally bad toxins when near scented candles." Sverdllove. "Stop Making Scents" 2007

AIR FRESHENERS

Air fresheners work in one of, or a combination of the following four ways:

1. by killing your ability to smell by way of a nerve-deadening chemical
2. by coating your nasal passages with an undetectable oily film
3. by covering up one smell with another
4. (rarely) by breaking down the offensive odor

Let's look at a few of the toxic chemicals in air fresheners/plug-ins:

<u>Benzyl Alcohol</u> - "...upper respiratory tract irritation, headaches, nausea and vomiting, a depressed central nervous system and a drop in blood pressure."	<u>Camphor</u> - "On EPA's Hazardous Waste List... readily absorbed through the body tissues...irritation of eyes, skin, nose, and throat...dizziness, confusion, nausea, twitching muscles and convulsions...avoid inhalation of vapors."
<u>Dichlorobenzene</u> - "extremely toxic, a central nervous system depressant, kidney and liver poison. One of the chlorinated hydrocarbons that is long-lasting in the environment and is stored in body fat. Vapor irritating to skin, eyes and throat. Banned in California."	<u>Ethanol</u> -- "... derived from petroleum and is carcinogenic... toxic to the skin, respiratory, cardiovascular, developmental, endocrine, neurological, and gastrointestinal systems."
<u>Pinene</u> - "...Flammable Incompatible with strong oxidizing agents. Eye, skin, & respiratory irritant. May be absorbed through skin...very destructive of mucous membranes.	<u>Limonene</u> - "...Carcinogenic, prevent its contact with skin or eyes because it is an irritant and sensitizer ...always wash thoroughly after using this material and before eating or drinking...do not inhale limonene vapor."
<u>Naphthalene</u> - "... a carcinogen that accumulates in our waters and marine life. It can be irritating to the skin, alter kidney function, cause cataracts, and is toxic (cardiovascular and developmental), especially to children. It can be poisonous if inhaled, swallowed, or absorbed through the skin.	<u>Phenol</u> - "...can cause skin to swell, burn, peel, and break out in hives ... cold sweats, convulsions, circulatory collapse, coma and even death.
<u>Formaldehyde</u> - "...toxic if inhaled, poisonous if swallowed, skin and eye irritant, carcinogenic..."	

Tips for Choosing Healthy Products:

- Choose products that list all ingredients
- Examine the list of ingredients to check that the word *fragrance* does not appear. Essential oils are usually listed separately.
- Be prudent, because even if the label advertises "unscented," some manufacturers use masking agents that block our ability to perceive odors, so not only is fragrance still in the product, even more chemicals are present.
- Avoid phthalates and parabens which disrupt reproductive and thyroid function.
- Since no legal definitions exist for natural, nontoxic, and hypoallergenic, those words don't always signify a healthier product.

Works Referenced:

Sverdlove, Jill. "Stop Making Scents" Alternative Medicine. April, 2007. p. 72

The CIA Campaign "Fragrance Tidbits" online: www.cleanerindoorair.org.

Fleming, Julie. "Let's Clear the Air about Air Fresheners and Plug-Ins" Brochure provided by The Global Campaign for Recognition of Multiple Chemical Sensitivity.

Bridges, Betty. 2002. *Fragrances: The Health Risks*. Brochure provided by the Fragranced Products Information Network. September 1, 2002