



Safer Suds

Eliminating a Cancer-Causing Chemical
in Shampoos and Soaps



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For decades, a cancer-causing chemical called cocamide DEA has been widely used in soaps, shampoos, bubble baths, and other similar products.

Last summer, the Center for Environmental Health (CEH) initiated legal action to require companies that make and sell these products to remove cocamide DEA. Legal action is now pending with over 150 companies. We have finalized legal settlements with 14 companies, 12 more agreements are expected soon, and many others are in ongoing negotiations. Companies that have signed agreements with CEH include Colgate-Palmolive, Saks, Shikai, and Walgreens, among others. All 26 settling companies have agreed to remove cocamide DEA from their products.

This is a victory for our health. Simply put, there is no reason why anyone should be lathering a cancer-causing chemical into their hair or their children's hair. It is also a victory for Proposition 65, California's consumer protection law that has been promoting safer products without harmful chemicals since 1986. CEH used Proposition 65 to create the legal agreements that are removing cocamide DEA from these personal care products.

Still, federal action for tougher chemical regulations in cosmetics and personal care products is needed to end health threats before harmful products end up in our homes. CEH and the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics urge Congress to modernize the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, which has been updated only once since it was adopted more than 75 years ago.

We congratulate the 26 companies that have taken action to eliminate cocamide DEA. It's a big step in the right direction. However, there are more than 10,000 ingredients used to formulate cosmetics and personal care products, and cocamide DEA is just the tip of the iceberg of a much larger problem. We urge every cosmetics maker to ensure all the chemicals used to make their products are truly safe.



Cocamide DEA and its Health Hazards

The US Department of Health and Human Services, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer have all concluded that cocamide DEA is a carcinogen.

Cocamide DEA is a synthetic chemical made by a chemical reaction between coconut oils and diethanolamine. It is “not known to occur in nature” according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Cocamide DEA has been frequently used in shampoos, soaps, bubble baths, and shower gels as a foaming agent (to make bubbles) and as a thickener. CEH has also found cocamide DEA in shaving creams and some dishwashing detergents.

In 2001, the National Toxicology Program (part of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services) identified cocamide DEA as a carcinogen (cancer-causing chemical) based on laboratory studies in which cocamide DEA was applied to the skin of mice. In these studies, exposure to cocamide DEA caused liver and kidney cancer.

The National Toxicology Program study was evaluated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Both agencies concluded that cocamide DEA is a carcinogen.



Proposition 65 and Cocamide DEA

Proposition 65 (or, as it is officially known, the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986) is California's consumer protection law for toxic chemicals.

Passed by voters in 1986, the law requires businesses to warn Californians if they expose consumers to significant amounts of toxic chemicals. The law covers two types of toxic chemicals: those that cause cancer and those that cause birth defects or other reproductive harm. California's governor is charged with maintaining a list of these toxic chemicals, and the list is updated at least annually.

In 2012, cocamide DEA was identified by California as a cancer-causing chemical. As required under Prop 65, businesses were given a one-year grace period, after which they would be required to either warn their customers about the presence of cocamide DEA or remove it from their products.

Beginning in the summer of 2013, CEH purchased hundreds of shampoos and other products at outlets of major national stores around California and from online retailers. We looked for products that contained cocamide DEA without any warning label, in violation of Proposition 65. We initiated litigation with over 150 companies who make and/or sell the products. Products found in violation of the law represent virtually every market sector: expensive and discount, boutique and major brands, for adults and for children, and products marketed to ethnic communities.

Since 2013, CEH has taken legal action against 150 companies who made or sold personal care products that contained cocamide DEA.



Legal Agreements End Use of Cocamide DEA

On May 2, 2014, Alameda County Superior Court approved the first 14 consent judgments resulting from our litigation. The companies involved all agreed to stop using cocamide DEA in their products. While our litigation is binding only in California, we expect the companies will stop making and selling products with cocamide DEA nationwide. Given the size of the California market, and the nationwide demand for safer products, it is usually neither cost-effective nor consumer-friendly for companies to use safer ingredients in California only.

The fourteen companies who agreed to stop using cocamide DEA in their products are:

- Ampro Industries, Inc.
- Avlon Industries, Inc.
- House of Cheatham, Inc.
- McBride Research Labs, Inc.
- Person & Covey, Inc.
- Saks Incorporated
- Todd Christopher International, Inc. dba Vogue International
- Trans-India Products, Inc. dba Shikai Products
- Accessory Zone, LLC
- Colgate-Palmolive Company
- Lush Handmade Cosmetics Ltd.
- Michel Design Works Ltd.
- Pharmaca Integrative Pharmacy, Inc.
- Somerset Toiletry Company, Ltd.

Another 12 companies have signed agreements that we expect will be approved by the court in June:

- ConvaTec, Inc.
- Fisk Industries, Inc.
- Grandall Distributing Co, Inc.
- Hoyu America Transition Co.
- Mudlark Papers, Inc.
- Olympic Mountain and Marine Products, Inc.
- Walgreen Co. and its subsidiary Drugstore.com, Inc.
- Farouk Systems, Inc.
- Golden Sun, dba Newhall Labs, Inc.
- Grisi Hnos., S.A. de C.V.
- Imperial Dax Company, Inc.
- Skinfood USA, Inc.

While our litigation is binding only in California, we expect the companies will stop making and selling products with cocamide DEA nationwide.

Examples of Products Involved in our Litigation

Colgate-Palmolive



House of Cheatham



Saks 5th Avenue



Shikai



Grisi



Walgreens





Policy Recommendations

We congratulate the companies named in this report for stepping up to provide their customers with healthier products by removing cocamide DEA. They deserve our support for making this decision, and for doing so quickly. However, there are more than 10,000 ingredients used in cosmetics and personal care products, and cocamide DEA is just the tip of the iceberg of a much larger problem. Most people are being exposed to scores of hazardous chemicals every day, from personal care products and many other sources.

That is why the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics is advocating for stronger, more health-protective laws so that consumers can be confident that all of the ingredients in the personal care products they buy are safe. Current federal law, the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act of 1938, was adopted more than 75 years ago and has only been updated once. The law allows cancer-causing chemicals in [baby shampoo](#), [hormone disruptors in fragrance](#), and [lead in lipstick](#).

Currently, the \$71 billion cosmetics industry is virtually self-regulated because decisions about ingredient safety are ceded to the cosmetics industry. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) can't require cosmetics companies to conduct safety assessments before chemicals are used, and can't even require product recalls.

Congress:
Pass the Safe
Cosmetics and
Personal Care
Products Act
of 2013

CEH and the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics call on Congress to pass the Safe Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Act of 2013. It would require:

- A phase-out of ingredients linked to cancer, birth defects, and developmental harm
- Creation of a health-based safety standard that includes protections for children, the elderly, workers, and other vulnerable populations
- Elimination of labeling loopholes by requiring full ingredient disclosure on product labels and company websites, including salon products and the constituent ingredients of fragrance
- Worker access to information about unsafe chemicals in personal care products
- Data-sharing to avoid duplicative testing and encourage the development of alternatives to animal testing
- Adequate funding so the FDA has the resources it needs to more effectively regulate the cosmetics industry



What You Can Do

- 1 Carefully read labels on your soaps, shampoos, and other similar products. Don't buy products that list cocamide DEA as an ingredient. While companies are removing this chemical from their products, there are still old products on store shelves.
- 2 Check out the [Think Dirty®](#) app to learn more about the potentially toxic ingredients in your cosmetics and personal care products. Don't buy products that list those ingredients.
- 3 Tell Dollar General to stop selling products that contain cocamide DEA [here](#).
- 4 Ask your U.S. Representative to co-sponsor and support the Safe Cosmetics and Personal Care Products Act of 2013 [here](#). Congress needs to know that this issue is important to consumers!
- 5 Learn more and stay updated from [CEH](#) and the [Campaign for Safe Cosmetics](#).

**The Campaign for
Safe Cosmetics**
www.SafeCosmetics.org

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The Center for Environmental Health (CEH) has a 17-year track record of protecting children and families from harmful chemicals in our air, water, food, and in dozen of everyday products. CEH also works with major industries and leaders in green business to promote healthier alternatives to toxic products and practices

References

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