



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Department of Toxic Substances Control

News Release

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DTSC Proposes Regulating Toxic Chemical in Nail Products

If approved, manufacturers will have to look for safer alternatives to toluene

SACRAMENTO – The Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) announced today that it is taking steps to promote safer alternatives to a toxic chemical found in many nail products.

Because of the danger it poses to nail salon workers and their customers, DTSC is proposing to list nail products containing the chemical toluene as a Priority Product under its Safer Consumer Products program. If adopted, the regulation would require manufacturers to look for alternatives to the chemical if they want to continue serving the California market.

“The industry has known for a long time that toluene is a problematic chemical in these products. Responsible manufacturers have moved away from it. We want to make sure that others do the same,” said Meredith Williams, acting director of DTSC. “At the same time, it’s important to make sure that any reformulated products are truly safer. A Priority Product listing ensures that manufacturers do a thorough analysis of these alternatives.”

Toluene is a solvent that can be harmful to people who breathe in its fumes. Extended exposure has been linked to nervous system damage and harm to the respiratory tract. Exposure in the workplace has also been associated with developmental effects, such as increased risk of low birthweight.

Nail salon workers are particularly at risk because they may be exposed to the chemical from multiple products over long work hours—sometimes in small, poorly ventilated workspaces. Studies show that toluene has been detected in salons at levels above California regulatory standards.

DTSC is concerned about the health impacts to the approximately 130,000 nail salon workers in California. Many of these workers are women of child-bearing age from low-income, Asian immigrant communities.

“This is a significant milestone for nail salon workers across the state,” said Julia Liou, chief deputy of Asian Health Services. “We applaud DTSC for taking leadership in protecting the health of nail salon workers who are predominantly immigrant women cumulatively exposed to toxic chemicals on a daily basis.”

“This intentional effort to spur safer nail care products for both workers and consumers in this industry is what is needed to tackle the underlying environmental and social injustices faced by the nail salon workforce,” she said.

Liou and Asian Health Services established the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative in 2005 after discovering that nail salon workers were experiencing an epidemic of health problems, including asthma, chronic rashes and miscarriages.

“We appreciate DTSC driving the development and use of safer chemicals and safer nail products starting with toluene,” said Catherine Porter, policy director for the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative. “We hope nail salons across California become healthier places to work as research on safer alternative chemicals in nail products continues.”

As a first step toward listing toluene, DTSC is releasing a draft technical report that outlines the scientific basis for the proposal, and inviting comment from stakeholders and the public. On March 13, DTSC will host a public workshop to receive comments. The technical report will be updated based on this input and then submitted to an independent scientific review panel.

Click [here](#) for more information and to view the technical report.

This proposal is the latest effort by DTSC to protect salon workers and their customers from toxic chemicals associated with nail salons. In 2012, DTSC, in collaboration with the city of San Francisco, released a study that found many nail products contained hazardous chemicals even though their labels claimed otherwise. In 2018, the Department helped develop the Healthy Nail Salon Recognition program, which encourages salon owners to create safer work environments.

Toluene in nail products becomes DTSC’s latest proposed Priority Product under its Safer Consumer Products regulation. Click [here](#) to learn more about the Safer Consumer Products program.

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FOR GENERAL INQUIRIES: Contact the Department of Toxic Substances Control by phone at (800) 728-6942 or visit www.dtsc.ca.gov. To report illegal handling, discharge, or disposal of hazardous waste, call the Waste Alert Hotline at (800) 698-6942.

The mission of DTSC is to protect California’s people and environment from harmful effects of toxic substances by restoring contaminated properties, enforcing hazardous waste law, reducing hazardous waste generation, and encouraging the manufacture of chemically safer products.