

HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE Nail Salon Industry

Summary

Nail salon workers provide pampering and beautifying treatments to their customers but are themselves exposed to serious occupational hazards. Nail technicians are at risk of developing illnesses as a result of chemical exposure, contracting infectious diseases, and sustaining ergonomic injuries. Oversight of the cosmetics industry is inadequate to protect worker health and safety and regulations of cosmetic ingredients need to be strengthened.

Nail Salons Flourish in California

The cosmetology industry is the largest professional licensed population in the countryⁱ and nail salons are one of the fastest growing sectors in the industry. In 2005, there were over 8,000 licensed nail salonsⁱⁱ and over 85,000 nail techniciansⁱⁱⁱ in California alone. Eighty percent of those nail technicians in California are Vietnamese and most are limited-English-proficient. The overwhelming majority are women of reproductive age.

Nail Salon Workers are Exposed to Hazardous Working Conditions

Nail salon workers are exposed to a wide range of chemicals including carcinogens and reproductive toxins, are at risk of contracting bacterial, fungal, and viral infections, and can develop ergonomic injuries as a result of their repetitive work.

- **Hazardous Chemicals**—Ingredients commonly found in nail products have been linked to cancer, respiratory irritation, developmental and reproductive abnormalities, skin sensitization, headaches, and other health-related problems.^{iv} The California Occupational Mortality Study found that the breast cancer rate among cosmetologists was 1.8 times higher than that of the general

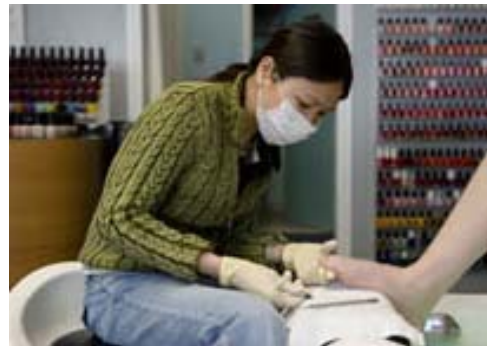


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population, even after adjusting for smoking, alcohol, and socioeconomic status.^v Nail product ingredients include dibutyl phthalate, formaldehyde, toluene, and camphor.^{vi}

- **Infectious Diseases**—Workers are at risk of exposure to biological hazards that cause infectious diseases such as blood born pathogens (Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV), fungal infections (Ringworm), and skin inflammations (dermatitis).^{vii}
- **Ergonomic Hazards**—Nail salon workers use forceful repetitive movements such as filing and buffing nails and holding uncomfortable positions for long periods of time, thereby increasing risk for musculoskeletal injuries.

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Government Oversight of the Cosmetology Industry is Inadequate

The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA), the state agency in charge of overseeing worker health, is severely understaffed. In May 2006, Cal/OSHA had one inspector for every 74,013 workers in California.^{viii} Increasing Cal/OSHA staffing could assist in enforcement efforts but its Consultation Services should also be expanded. This service allows nail salons to voluntarily request a non-punitive site visit from Cal/OSHA so that employers can learn how to avoid potential hazards and prevent future citations.^{ix} Cal/OSHA should also provide interpretive services to assist limited-English-proficient workers and owners. Furthermore, Cal/OSHA has not set ergonomic standards and thus cannot protect workers from repetitive stress injuries.

Every time I opened a bottle of nail glue to do a silk wrap manicure, my nose would suddenly start to bleed. Even if I was sitting next to a station where nail glue is being applied, my nose would start to bleed. Whoever thought a strong guy like me would get nose bleeds from a tiny little bottle of nail glue.

-Nail Salon Worker in Alameda County

The California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (BBC), the state agency in charge of ensuring consumer safety, does little to fill the gap left by Cal/OSHA. As of 2007, there were 18 inspectors^x to monitor the 35,000 licensed barbering and cosmetology establishments in California. Although the BBC has made licensing exams available in Vietnamese and Spanish, the BBC needs to hire more

bilingual inspectors and needs to translate its notices and enforcement-related correspondence into other languages.

Manufacturers Lack Accountability with respect to Chemical Exposure

The cosmetics industry is a largely self-regulating industry with respect to chemicals. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require pre-market testing for cosmetics and thus cannot ensure that products currently in the market are safe.^{xi} Also, the FDA does not require manufacturers to list product ingredients if the products are used exclusively for commercial purposes, such as in nail salons.^{xii} Although the Cosmetic Ingredient Review Board (CIR) was established to assess the safety of cosmetics ingredients, it does not have the authority to prevent manufacturers from using chemicals it has determined to be unsafe.^{xiii} In one recent development, the California Safe Cosmetic Act of 2005 (SB484) requires cosmetic manufacturers to provide health-related information to the California Department of Health Services for cosmetic ingredients under investigation.^{xiv} While SB484 is an important first step towards transparency, significant gaps remain, such as the inability of the state to adequately regulate these ingredients.

Improving the health and safety of nail salon workers requires government agencies to take a proactive role in ensuring that salons meet health and safety standards. Significant shifts in policy are needed to eliminate or greatly reduce the use of hazardous chemicals in cosmetics products.

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- ⁱ “Issue Brief of the Nail Salon Industry: The Impact of Environmental Toxins on API Women’s Reproductive Health.” May 2006. *National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum*. 28 Feb 2007 <http://www.napawf.org/file/issues/issues-Nail_Salon.pdf>.
- ⁱⁱ “Nails Magazine 2005-2006 Big Book.” 2006. *Nails Magazine*. 1 March 2007 <http://www.nailsmag.com/pdfView.aspx?pdfName=2006_RegionalAnalysis.pdf>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*
- ^{iv} “Protecting the Health of Nail Salon Workers.” March 2007. *Environmental Protection Agency*. 11 April 2007 <<http://www.epa.gov/dfe/pubs/projects/salon/nailsalonguide.pdf>>.
- ^v Doebbert G., Riedmiller K.R., and Kizer K.W. “Occupational Mortality of California Women, 1979-1981.” *West J Med*. 1988 Dec; 149(6): 734-740.
- ^{vi} “Protecting the Health of Nail Salon Workers.” March 2007. *Environmental Protection Agency*. 11 April 2007 <<http://www.epa.gov/dfe/pubs/projects/salon/nailsalonguide.pdf>>.
- ^{vii} “Workplace Health and Safety.” 2 June 2005. *Department of Employment and Industrial Relations*. 28 Feb 2007 <<http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/hairedressing/guide/hazards/biological/>>.
- ^{viii} “Data on Cal/OSHA Inspections.” 18 May 2006. *Legislative Analyst’s Office*. 4 May 2007 <http://www.lao.ca.gov/handouts/state_admin/2006/data_calosha_05_18_06.pdf>.
- ^{ix} *Division of Occupational Safety and Health*. 2003. State of California. 28 Feb 2007 <<http://www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/consultation.html>>.
- ^x Chang, M. “Two new laws affect industry and consumers.” *Oakland Tribune*. January 22, 2007.
- ^{xi} Lewis, C. “Clearing Up Cosmetic Confusion.” May-June 1998. Updated August 2000. *FDA Consumer Magazine*. 5 March 2007 <http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/1998/398_cosm.html>.
- ^{xii} *Id.*
- ^{xiii} *Cosmetic Ingredient Review Board*. 2007. Cosmetic Ingredients Review Board. 2 March 2007 <<http://www.cir-safety.org/>>.
- ^{xiv} “California Safe Cosmetic Act of 2005, Senate Bill No. 484.” 2007. *Official California Legislative Information*. 9 March 2007 <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/05-06/bill/sen/sb_0451-0500/sb_484_bill_20051007_chaptered.pdf>.