

Invisible News

ISSUE 7 BROUGHT to YOU by the GENEVA CHEMICALS & WASTE CLUSTER at the 4th UN Environment Assembly 11-15 March 2019

CHEMICALS & WASTE in your BEDROOM?

Some cosmetics, clothes & jewelry are potentially harmful

You don't see the possible risks from these everyday products in your bedroom or your wardrobe, but that doesn't mean they are not there. Unfortunately, many products we use to make ourselves comfortable or attractive, might be harming our health.

Pesticides applied to cotton can be present in the clothes we wear. And think also of the farm-workers, many of whom are probably women and children, who are even more intensively exposed to pesticides every day, at work. Clothes can also contain microplastics and persistent organic pollutants (POPs) such as PFOA.

Cosmetics can be dangerous as well. From lead in some lipsticks, mercury in mascara, to phthalates in certain hairsprays, fragrances and nail-polishes, our skin can be exposed to a range of harmful chemicals. Of the estimated 13,000 chemicals used in such products only about 10% have been evaluated for safety.

A recent study concluded that women of colour, independent of socioeconomic status, are most exposed to such toxic chemicals, through the use of skin-whiteners and hair products which often contain toxic substances, including heavy metals such as mercury and lead.

Finally, even jewelry can present a hazard – to the wearer through mercury and other heavy metals in the items themselves – and also especially to the many artisanal gold miners, who use mercury in the extraction process, whilst producing 20% of the world's gold.



Cosmetics may contain a range of harmful substances, with skin-whiteners identified as amongst the most hazardous to the user.

Making the Invisible, Visible

The Geneva Chemicals & Waste Cluster is a group of international organisations in Geneva which collectively work to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals and waste. This lounge area installation is brought to you by four organizations of this cluster, namely:

- Secretariat of the [Basel, Rotterdam, & Stockholm Conventions](#) (BRS);
- Secretariat of the [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#);
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management ([SAICM](#)); and
- [UN Environment](#), Chemicals and Health Branch (UNEP)

See www.brsmeas.org www.mercuryconvention.org www.saicm.org and www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste for more info



Since women consume the vast majority of cosmetic and beauty products, they are consequently at higher risk than men to such harmful effects.

Health before beauty, or beauty before health (and environment)?

Fortunately, healthier, safer and more environmentally-friendly alternatives generally do exist. From organic cotton clothing, to safe cosmetics, to jewelry produced using gold extracted through mercury-free techniques, to Mercury-free mascara, the markets are moving in a positive direction and the range of products that are free of toxic chemicals is expanding all the time.

Such consumer choices have positive impacts upon human health and the environment. Minimising waste, in particular by refraining from overly frequent changes of clothing and by recycling, can also have a positive environmental impact, given that the clothing production sector is energy-, water- and carbon-intensive.

The circular economy approach to manufacturing, whereby a given product's entire lifecycle is planned for and integrated into product design and lifetime footprint will be key to transformation of such sectors.

Safeguard your bedroom and wardrobe and protect yourself from potentially harmful impacts on your health and the environment!

What can you do?

- Read the next *Invisible News* sheets to educate yourself about the hazards;
- Visit the websites listed to find out more;
- Seek out safe alternatives when buying make-up, toiletries: READ the labelling;
- Discuss with your children, relatives, neighbours.



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