



This Green Life

A Journal of Sorts



THE COST OF SHAMPOO

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Many features of modern life are commonly regarded as necessary evils. Take cars, for instance. Despite their contribution to climate change and suburban sprawl, few people, environmentalists included, would propose that we do away with them entirely.

Reengineer them, yes; outlaw them, no. Other evils are obviously unnecessary. The harm they do is so evident, and gains they confer so inessential, that there is little societal disagreement about the need to ban them (think toxic dumping).

So, what about animal testing? This thorny issue engenders honest, deeply felt opinions on both sides. For people with diseases like AIDS, it may represent a lifeline; for animal protection advocates, a crime. As usual, most people hold views closer to the center but are confused and sometimes troubled by their own positions, which tend to vary with the purpose of the test.



I belong to the centrist group, accepting certain types of animal testing, while balking at the rest. One kind I find particularly objectionable is animal testing for shampoos, make-up and other cosmetics -- a practice that strikes me as wholly unnecessary. How could it be otherwise when cosmetics themselves are so superfluous?

I'm not saying we should do without them. I'd miss my lipsticks and moisturizers as much as anyone, but wouldn't want to cause animals pain or death to get them.

However, there's no danger of having to do without. If animal testing for cosmetics were banned (as the EU is trying to do), companies could make cosmetics with ingredients already proven safe, of which there are thousands.

Interestingly, cosmetics companies are not required by the government to do animal tests -- or any tests -- to get their products to market. (The Food and Drug Administration has authority only to regulate cosmetics afterwards, if they prove harmful.) This lack of oversight makes it possible for companies to sell you cosmetics that contain endocrine disrupters and known carcinogens. So, the current situation is bad in two, seemingly opposite, ways. On the one hand, cosmetics companies are testing new and unnecessary ingredients on animals rather than sticking with existing ingredients that are known to be safe. And on the other, companies are blithely using ingredients already known or suspected of being unsafe. [This is a large topic, which I'll cover in a future issue. Meanwhile, try the "Skin Deep" link under "Online Resources" for information on questionable ingredients in cosmetics.]

Happily, the problem of animal testing for cosmetics has actually improved over the last 25 years. Due largely to public outrage in the 80's over the Draize Test on rabbits, there's been a huge reduction in the number of animals used for cosmetics testing. Still, the practice continues. One reason is that there are not enough solid alternatives yet. Another is that companies are worried, from the liability perspective, about veering from methods that seem tried and true.



Sheryl Eisenberg, a long-time advisor to NRDC, posts a new This Green Life every month. Sheryl makes her home in Tribeca (NYC), where—along with her children, Sophie and Gabby, and husband, Peter—she tries to put her environmental principles into practice. No fooling.



Seal of approval. The Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics awards a seal to cosmetics companies that agree to be audited for animal-free testing.

The wrinkle in Botox. Botox is a powerful poison (biological weapons material, as some like to say), so product safety is a serious issue. Every batch must be tested to determine the proper dose, and for that, an LD50 test is performed. One hundred mice are typically used in each LD50 test, according to the Humane Society of the United States. Allergan, the manufacturer, has indicated that it is pursuing alternative methods, but will continue to use the LD50 for now.

It's not that animal tests are unimpeachable. Given the differences among species, within species and even in the same animals over time, it is not possible to extrapolate perfectly from animals to humans. That said, animal tests are still the only method, at present, that has been scientifically validated for many types of research.

I'm hoping a day will come in the not-too-distant future when there will be enough scientifically validated alternative procedures for testing cosmetics to replace animal tests completely -- and that all companies will use them. Consumers can hasten this development by switching to "cruelty-free" brands that exist today. The good news is, there are a variety to choose from. The bad news is, they're not all genuine. Some brands use the "cruelty-free" claim in a misleading way. The final product hasn't been tested on animals, but the ingredients have been. For this reason, it's best to shop armed with a guide that identifies brands that are truly cruelty-free (such as the shopping guide listed under "Online Resources"). Once you've identified a couple of cruelty-free brands you like, tell your friends about it to double the good you do. With consumer campaigns, the snowball effect is everything.

—Sheryl Eisenberg



Use your judgment. Two cosmetics brands I personally like are Tom's of Maine and Burt's Bees. Tom's is on the approved list put out by the Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics. Burt's isn't, though its label does say "not tested on animals." There's no way of knowing why it's not on the list without researching the question. Maybe Burt's didn't apply. Or maybe it didn't meet the Coalition's standards, possibly because one ingredient is beeswax, which might disturb a strict animal rightist.

The point is, brands that aren't on the list have not necessarily been tested on animals. In the end, you need to use your own judgment. I've decided to trust Burt's "no animal testing" claim because it's consistent with the company's use of natural ingredients and containers made with post-consumer recycled plastic.

ANIMAL TESTS -- AND THE ALTERNATIVE

Cosmetics are tested using a variety of animal tests. Two of the best known are:

The Draize Test - used to determine eye irritation. In this procedure, a chemical is dropped into an animal's eye (usually an albino rabbit's), and the eye is then observed for signs of damage.

The LD50 (Lethal Dose 50 percent) Test - used to determine acute toxicity -- specifically, the dose that will kill 50 percent of a group of animals. This test is usually performed on rats and mice.

The alternative testing community is pursuing a three-pronged approach, called the three Rs, which consists of:

- 1) **Reduction** of the number of animals tested, as when fewer animals are used for an LD50 test.
- 2) **Refinement** of the testing methods so as to minimize suffering, such as when imaging is used, instead of an invasive or lethal procedure, to investigate what's happening inside an animal.
- 3) **Replacement** of current tests with alternatives that do not involve living animals (or in the best case, animals at all). These include tissue culture tests, mathematical and computer modeling and human studies.

One alternative technique that everyone's familiar with is the pregnancy test. Nowadays, a woman usually tests her urine at home with a diagnostic kit she gets at the drugstore. This, and blood tests done by the doctor, have replaced the "rabbit test" in which a woman's urine was injected into a female rabbit, after which the rabbit was killed so its ovaries could be examined.

Sheryl Eisenberg is a web developer and writer. With her firm, Mixit Productions (<http://www.mixitproductions.com>), she brought NRDC online in 1996, designed NRDC's first websites, and continues to develop special web features for NRDC. She created and, for several years, wrote the Union of Concerned Scientists' green living column, *Greentips*, and has designed and contributed content to many non-profit sites.

ONLINE RESOURCES

COALITION FOR CONSUMER INFORMATION ON COSMETICS: Shopping Guide - http://www.leapingbunny.org/shopping_guide.htm
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY: Alternatives to Animal Testing - <http://altweb.jhsph.edu/education/FAQs.htm>
CENTER FOR LABORATORY ANIMAL WELFARE: Product Testing - http://www.labanimalwelfare.org/product_testing.html
FDA: Authority Over Cosmetics - <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/cos-206.html>
HORIZON SOLUTIONS: Alternatives to Animal Use for Safety Testing - http://www.solutions-site.org/cat9_sol103.htm
HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE US: Botox Kills Animals - <http://www.hsus.org/ace/21435>
CNN: EU to Ban Animal-tested Cosmetics - <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/europe/01/15/eu.testing/>
ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP: Skin Deep - http://www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep/report/executive_summary.php
DUKE UNIVERSITY: Brief History of Beauty and Hygiene Products - <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/adaccess/cosmetics-history.html>

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