

Salons seek greener solutions

stylists trim their customers' health risks by turning to more natural hair dyes

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Jennifer Arehart, rear, a stylist at Allure Aveda and More, works with client Jordan Jenifer of Mount Tremper at the salon in the Village of Rhinebeck



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For Living & Being*

If you're a blonde wanting more fun, or a brunette bent on banishing your "bride of Frankenstein" white streak, a bottle of hair dye may be the answer.

There's nothing new about wanting to enhance your image and look younger. History tells us the Romans lusted after perfect hair color, using about 100 concoctions with such unsavory ingredients as leeches, charred eggs and walnut shells. Since then, most hair dye made from natural sources has been replaced with a highly chemical, hair-color cocktail.

What goes into most hair dyes and shampoos today could literally make your hair stand on end.

Among the vast list of harsh chemicals found in hair dye are resorcinol, paraphenylene-diamine, or PPD, and coal tar, all known to be toxic, carcinogenic and mutagenic. PPD is what makes hair dyes permanent while keeping hair looking natural.

It's the same chemical substance found in textile or fur dyes, dark-colored cosmetics, temporary tattoos, photographic developer, photocopying and printing inks, black rubber, oils, greases and gasoline. Resorcinol is a chemical needed for the oxidation process in hair dyeing; the amount used determines the intensity of reds or yellows in the colored hair.

Trying to cover a silvery streak? Covering gray means using darker hair dye made from the common ingredient coal tar, which comes from converting bituminous coal into coke or hot-burning fuel used in smelting iron.

Hair dye is directly applied nearest to the hair root and is easily absorbed in the body through the scalp, where it gets into the bloodstream. Research has linked hair dye ingredients with cancers, severe allergic reactions and respiratory irritants, especially when used repeatedly over the long term. Women and some men who dye their hair as often as every three to six weeks are at risk.

Enter the "green hair salon," a growing trend in the United States and many parts of Europe. These specialty salons use hair products that are less toxic with more naturally derived ingredients and cater to people wanting to dye their hair without serious health consequences.

One of the first local green salons was opened by Marlene Weber in 1976 in LaGrangeville. Weber eventually merged her hair salon with her spa and opened the Marlene Weber Day Spa in Poughkeepsie in 1992. Today she has a clientele base of about 10,000 with 300-400 using her spa and hair salon weekly.

"I have conversations every day in my salon with people concerned about the ingredients and the integrity behind products," she said. "We know now for sure that everything we put on our skin and on our scalp is absorbed into the bloodstream, whether it's hair color or some other product."

In the late 1970s, Weber hooked up with Aveda, one of the first cosmetic and hair companies to produce botanically based hair products with few chemicals. Aveda claims its products are 97 percent pure, a strong selling point for Weber, who has used the products for 30 years.

Frequenting Weber's salon are recovering cancer patients who have undergone chemotherapy and are cautious about coloring regrown, gray hair.

"Cancer patients are very much aware of chemicals, and they are very sensitive to certain levels of toxicity — especially when they have just been bombarded with chemo. The last thing I want to do is add more to the mix for a recovering cancer client," Weber said.

Weber also said women who are pregnant or breast-feeding have come to her spa because she uses naturally based products.

Allure in Rhinebeck is another salon using the Aveda line of hair products. Owner Lois DiDonna has been in the hair-coloring business 41 years, and because of her own sensitive skin always sought chemical-free products.

Of the several hundred people who pass through Allure's doors every week, many want to color their hair with permanent or semipermanent hair color and use chemical-free shampoos.

"I'm allergic to everything and am careful of what my hairdressers put on their hands and breathe into

their bodies," DiDonna said.

For beauty parlors using mainstream hair products, health risks are high for hairdressers, who repeatedly mix, breathe and apply mainstream dyes containing PPD and coal tar.

A study by scientists at the University of Southern California's School of Medicine showed hairdressers and barbers working for more than 10 years with conventional hair dye face a fivefold increase in the risk of bladder cancer. Other University of Southern California studies on coal tar-based hair colors say women using permanent hair dye at least once a month for more than a year more than double their bladder cancer risk.

The three main types of hair coloring processes are temporary, semipermanent and permanent dyes. Permanent hair-coloring products use hydrogen peroxide and ammonia, which are mixed together with other chemicals right before applying to the hair. As an oxidizing agent, the peroxide starts the color process and the ammonia separates the hair cuticle, allowing the dye to penetrate into the hair cortex. Temporary hair dyes do not penetrate the hair shaft and rinse out after a few washings. Semipermanent hair dyes also avoid penetrating the hair shaft and last a bit longer — five to 10 washings. Permanent hair dye will cause permanent chemical changes in the hair shaft and will not change color until new hair grows in.

Toni Kulpinski, owner of Revelation Beauty Spa and Wellness Center in Marlboro since 1999, had reservations with Aveda products because of the chemicals they contain. Eleven years ago she sought out herb-based hair color products and found an Italian product that she has used on her clients for more than a decade.

"The hair color I use is from herbs grown naturally without the use of pesticides and herbicides," said Kulpinski, who compared the product to Cappelli Naturali, another herbal-based Italian hair color.

"Natural hair color lasts longer because it doesn't have the oxidation process which dries the hair. Herb-based color lasts longer, has a staining affect that covers the gray, and the colors are very intense," Kulpinski said.

Kulpinski is a certified nutritional consultant who takes a holistic approach to hair color. Her staff includes two licensed cosmetologists, hairstylists, two massage therapists and a hypnotherapist — all with nutritional backgrounds. She has a dedicated clientele of about 200.

"The skin is the largest organ of our body, and basically we eat through our skin. Hair color filters through the kidneys and other organs," Kulpinski said. "Everything works synergistically. We use organic products for your skin and products you can take orally. People are shying away from hair color made with cancer-causing chemicals."

Nanci Anderson-Mesman, owner of Sanjula Salon in Hudson, said many of her clients are allergic to hair dye with ammonia.

"Ammonia seems to be a turn-off when people know it's in the hair color, and they ask specifically if the dye has ammonia because of their reactions to it. It also seems that other hair dye ingredients are damaging and dry the hair."

Anderson-Mesman, who has been in the hair industry for 30 years and serves 70 clients, uses a product called Herbatint made by a company called Herbavita.

"Herbatint covers gray hair 100 percent. It's great for me because there is no chemical odor and the

salon smells clean."

Anderson-Mesman says her clients seem satisfied.

"For my clients between the ages of 40 and 65, covering their gray hair is a huge issue. So far, no one has wanted to switch back to chemically loaded color."

Karen Cashin, manager and color specialist at Jal Day Spa & Salon in Wappingers Falls, said she uses Aveda professionally and personally because of the company's worldwide environmental and sustainable practices.

"It makes a difference to me when I purchase Aveda products because of their recycling policies. It really goes back to their mission of caring for the world we live in."

The greening of the industry is not only about chemicals in the air, but also what happens to the chemicals after they get rinsed down the drain and into our soil and waterways. Some California hair salons even recycle hair clippings for use in absorbent mats used for oil-spill cleanups. Many salons have opted to use 100 percent botanical henna from home-grown formulations with no harmful ammonia, but some hair specialists claim henna doesn't completely cover gray hair.

In 2008, Jane Houlihan, director of research for the Environmental Working Group, a watchdog organization that examines consumer products, told a House subcommittee that personal-care products were one of the biggest sources of human exposure to dangerous chemicals. Houlihan said cosmetic and hair companies had free rein to use whatever ingredients they chose without warning consumers of any dangers because of the lack of federal standards and labeling loopholes.

The Environmental Working Group's "Skin Deep" Web site has a comprehensive database rating toxicity in cosmetic and personal-care products. Its list of the most dangerous hair dyes rates products on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most toxic. For instance, one shade of Clairol Natural Instincts — Level 2, Sahara 02, was rated 10. Clairol's hair dyes got an overall rating of 9.3, Revlon's hair dyes were rated the most dangerous overall with a score of 9.5, while Maxim's rated 9.4. The site rates some 52,462 products, 8,830 ingredients, 2,435 brands and 1,613 companies.

The decision between using harsh chemicals and living with strands of gray may be easier than you think. Growing numbers of hair-dye users concerned with the environmental effects and health risks of harsh chemicals may tip the scales, multiplying the demand for products made from botanicals and vegetable extracts.

The trend is evident for Weber.

"Most of my clients are baby boomers, and their children are bringing their kids up more holistically," she said. "Today, young adults have more time to research about products because they care more about what they eat and what they use on their bodies."

Additional Facts

Resources

- Environmental Working Group a nonprofit environmental research group in Washington: www.ewg.org
- Skin Deep, a safety guide to cosmetics and personal care products compiled by researchers at the Environmental Working Group. Here you can compare at-home hair-dye brands: www.cosmeticsdatabase.com

- HealthNewsDigest.com

Salons

Allure 12 Garden St. Rhinebeck 845-876-7774

Jai Day Spa & Salon Wappingers Falls 845-231-4041

Marlene Weber Day Spa 751 Dutchess Turnpike, Poughkeepsie 845-454-5852 www.marleneweber.com

Revelations Spa and Wellness Center 36 Western Ave. Marlboro 845-236-2568 www.hudsonvalleybeautysalon.com

Sanjula Salon 323 Warren St. Hudson 845-757-2266

On the Web

- www.aveda.com
 - www.herbavita.org
 - www.shadesnaturalcolor.com
 - Nori's EcoSalon: www.norisecosalon.com
 - Descend salon: www.descendsalon.com
 - EcoColors: www.ecocolors.net
 - Aveda: www.aveda.com
 - Modern Organic Products, Innersense: www.innersensebeauty.com
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