Popular Hair Straightener May Prove Poisonous to Beauticians

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Salon workers beware! The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a hazard warning to beauticians, noting that the formaldehyde in a relaxer called the Brazilian Blowout can cause serious health problems, according to a statement released by The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics.

After OSHA performed air monitoring test in salons, agency inspectors detected excessive formaldehyde levels in the Brazilian Blowout. What's more, in some cases, even "formaldehyde-free" versions of the relaxer failed safety tests.

"Workers have the right to know the risks associated with the chemicals with which they work, and how to protect themselves," said OSHA assistant secretary David Michaels, PhD.

OSHA's alert also comes on the heels of two important developments. First, the National Academy of Sciences released a report confirming the EPA's findings that formaldehyde causes cancer of the nose and throat and may put people at risk of leukemia (a type of blood cancer). Second, California's attorney general filed an injunction against Brazilian Blowout to force the company to place health warnings on the products. (The legal order noted that levels of formaldehyde in the hair straightener exceeded current safe exposure limits.)

"These dangerous products need to be pulled off the market, as they have been in Canada and elsewhere," said Alexandra Gorman Scranton, cofounder of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics. "Workers in salons across America are getting exposed to potentially unsafe levels of cancer-causing formaldehyde every day."

To eliminate beauticians' exposure to hazardous hair styling ingredients, OSHA recommended salon owners not use products containing these chemicals: formaldehyde, methylene glycol, formalin, methylene oxide, paraform, formic aldehyde, methanal, oxomethane, oxymethylene or Chemical Abstract Service Number 50-00-0.

The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics is leading an effort to pass the federal Safe Cosmetics Act to close loopholes in federal laws that allow toxic chemicals in personal care products.

Click here to read more about the ongoing investigation of Brazilian Blowout.

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