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Position Statement: Triclosan in Cosmetic Products

April, 2005

Recently, there have been articles in the press suggesting that triclosan, a widely used antibacterial agent, can react with free chlorine to produce chloroform, a known carcinogen. The press reports are based on a laboratory study ⁽¹⁾ describing chemical reactions that require an excessive concentration of chlorine far beyond levels found in household tap water. Unfortunately these press reports appear to have overreacted and exaggerated the significance of these findings. As Professor Vikesland, the researcher himself, stated: "I think people are jumping to conclusions. There isn't a huge need to worry at present."

Under normal usage conditions, the generation of chloroform from a low concentration of free chlorine present in household tap water cannot occur. In fact, Professor Vikesland was reported in the news to confirm this by saying the researchers are not sure the reaction happens every time and that it does depend on the amounts of chlorine and triclosan present, the acidity of the water and other factors.

Triclosan has been used safely and effectively in cosmetic products for more than thirty years. Regular reviews by regulatory authorities and chemical experts have shown no cause of concern for its safety. Products containing triclosan have been approved for sales by the authorities within the Asean countries, EU, U.S.A, Australia and numerous other countries around the world. Consumers can continue to use cosmetic products containing triclosan with confidence.

(1) Formation of Chloroform and Chlorinated Organics by Free-Chlorine-Mediated Oxidation of Triclosan

Krista L. Rule, Virginia R. Ebbett, and Peter J. Vikesland
Environ. Sci. & Technol.: 2005

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