



# WE WHAT'S THAT SMELL?

## REGULATORY OVERVIEW AND POLICY SOLUTIONS



### OVERVIEW

**F**ragrance mixtures used in cleaning products and other scented consumer products are comprised primarily of synthetic chemical ingredients. There are over 3,100 chemicals known to be used in fragrance, yet full information on the ingredients in fragrances is kept secret from consumers; in the absence of strong disclosure requirements, manufacturers often claim fragrance ingredients as a trade secret. Several common fragrance ingredients pose potential human health impacts, from eye and skin irritation and breathing problems to more serious impacts like increased risk of breast cancer and hormone disruption. Increasing the disclosure of fragrance ingredients in products can help individuals better understand and avoid unnecessary hazardous exposures.

### Regulatory History of Fragrance Ingredients

Chemicals used in fragrance are virtually unregulated by governmental agencies in the United States. Neither the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) nor the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has direct authority to monitor or require safety testing for fragrances used in cleaning products or cosmetics. Instead, the International Fragrance Research Association (IFRA), an industry trade group, sets standards for fragrance manufacturers and facilitates safety reviews of fragrance ingredients. IFRA publishes a Code of Practice, which is a set of voluntary standards for manufacturers of fragrance. However, there remains an inherent conflict of interest when a trade group funded by industry holds the responsibility for regulating it-

### CHEMICALS OF CONCERN COMMONLY FOUND IN FRAGRANCE:

**Allergens:** Numerous fragrance ingredients, even those which are natural compounds found in lavender oil and lemon oil, for example, can lead to allergies in sensitive persons. Exposure to allergens in fragrance through inhalation or absorption through the skin can cause skin and eye irritation, as well as more serious impacts such as breathing problems.

**Synthetic Musk:** Synthetic musks are man-made chemicals that are produced to replicate the musk scents originally obtained from musk deer and musk ox. The most commonly used synthetic musks are polycyclic musks, galaxolide, and tonalide, and two types of nitro musks, musk xylene, and musk ketone. Research indicates that synthetic musks are persistent, can bioaccumulate, are potential hormone disruptors, and may break down the body's defenses against other toxic chemical exposure.

**Phthalates:** Phthalates are a class of chemicals used in fragrance that do not contribute to a scent as musks or plant essences do, but rather act as solvents and carriers for those chemicals that create the scent in a fragrance. Phthalates pose a health concern as they have been shown to cause reproductive and developmental harm in laboratory animals, and are linked to similar impacts in humans.

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self. For example, the headquarters of IFRA in Geneva, Switzerland, is located at the same address as the head office of Givaudan, a global fragrance manufacturer with the largest international market share.

IFRA also coordinates an independent expert panel of dermatologists, toxicologists and environmental scientists called REXPAN, which is responsible for conducting safety assessments of fragrance ingredients. The safety assessments conducted by REXPAN are not entirely transparent. Although the safety assessments are published in publicly available scientific journals, a large proportion of the data on which the conclusions are based is unpublished research provided by the manufacturers themselves. This unpublished data is not peer-reviewed, nor made available to public scrutiny. In addition, compliance with the IFRA standards on prohibited and restricted fragrance chemicals is voluntary for manufacturers. There is little to no enforcement of these standards internationally.

## FEDERAL POLICY SOLUTIONS

### Household Products Labeling Act of 2009

The bill requires household cleaning products to bear a label which includes a full list of ingredients in the product, including ingredients in fragrance.

- ▼ S. 1697, introduced by Senator Al Franken. Referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.
- ▼ H.R. 3057, introduced by Representative Steve Israel. Referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

For more information on these policy solutions, contact Jamie Silberberger, Women's Voices for the Earth, 406-543-3747, [jamie@womensvoices.org](mailto:jamie@womensvoices.org)

## ALLERGENS

Twenty-six allergens that are components of fragrance must be listed on the labels



of cosmetics and cleaning products sold in the European Union (EU). This is done so that people who are allergic to these substances can avoid using products which contain them. If companies

are labeling allergens in the EU, why are they still allowed to keep them a secret from consumers in the United States?

### Safe Chemicals Act of 2010

The Safe Chemicals Act will reform the outdated Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 (TSCA), and would require safety substantiation of chemicals before they are placed on the market and in consumers goods like household cleaning products.

- ▼ S. 3209, introduced by Senator Frank Lautenberg. Referred to the committee on Environment and Public Works.



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