Black Going Green

Black Women for Wellness Production
We know it sounds funny, perhaps even hard to do, but Black women are going green in a big way. Black Women for Wellness is sharing our Black Going Green tips.
“Green is the new Black”
Black Women for Wellness’ grassroots efforts include sharing education and information with our community on being healthy and well. Additionally, providing insights into the layers of how to influence not only our family and friends, but those who create regulations and Policymakers concerning our environment are critical to increasing our options and access to living a environmentally healthy life.

**Personal Choices**
Shopping green with intention is a critical personal option we can take. Making personal choices includes educating ourselves on product ingredients, but also means empowerment by asking local businesses and professionals to carry or utilize products that support our personal green decisions.

**Government**
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are charged with creating regulations, monitoring, and enforcing those regulations that protect our health. Their charge includes matching the science with the guidelines so our families and communities can make easy environmentally sound choices. They are also responsible for holding industry and business accountable for any infractions of those regulations.
Elected Officials
Whether local, state or federal, elected officials are entrusted by their constituencies to work in the interest of the people. Our elected officials create policy that guides our lives, that informs government with direction and timeframes to write the regulations and enforce penalties for those who violate and/or hurt our environment. Officials are accountable to the people who have charged and trusted them as representatives for their health and well being.

Industry
The Beauty & Pharmaceutical Industry has invested heavily in developing personal care, cleaning and beauty products as well as pesticides that support our daily lives. It is a billion dollar industry that sometimes lose sight of the greater good in pursuit of profit, and demands by consumers for ease or accessibility of those products. However, this industry is in business to stay in business and will respond to consumer demands, government regulations, elected official oversight and of course media attention.
“Of the 10,000 chemicals in personal products, only 10% have been tested for safety by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA).”
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www.bwwla.com
Ingredients - Relaxers (creamy crack)

There are a number of chemicals in the creamy that make it, well, cracky. Two of the active chemicals, sodium hydroxide (lye) and calcium hydroxide (no lye) work by bonding to the hair and changing the structure of the hair permanently. These chemicals cause serious damage to the hair itself making it weak and prone to breakage. However, these chemicals don’t stop there. They can cause serious burns around the face and head (and other body parts the chemical comes in contact with), permanent scarring and blindness. Research is being done to see what effects these chemicals have on reproductive organs.

Directions for Green use:

There are no good relaxers. Sorry, folks. The only way for green change using this product is to not use it. However, with the new science in heating tools like a good flat iron and a pressing comb, you can achieve relaxer-like straight hair without the chemicals and the health hazard. In addition, there are a host of natural styles that eliminate the need for chemicals or heat all together. This might mean more maintenance for you in the long run, but it also comes with a longer run at a healthy life.
Ah detanglers, almost essential to untangling tender-headed little ones’ hair without tears. However, some detanglers are full of nasty little chemicals that do way more than detangle. Some detanglers include DMDM hydantoin and diazolidinyl urea which are anti-microbial preservatives that are also formaldehyde releasers. In addition, some detanglers have chemical forms of estrogen in them.

So, what do these chemicals mean for your health? Diazolidinyl urea and DMDM hydantoin are carcinogens that are linked to adverse effects such as cancer and asthma. Also, estrogen in children’s products have shown to cause the onset of early puberty in girls, along with other reproductive issues.

**Directions for Green use:**

Detangle hair by combing out in sections while the hair is wet. Braid sections before and after combing to prevent hair from getting re-tangled. Also, try using your own ingredients to soften hair like avocado, shea butter or coconut oil. For older children and adults, try using a blow dryer with a comb attachment to help detangle. If a good old-fashioned detangler is a must, avoid the products listed above.
Propylene Glycol

Shampoo & Conditioners
Watch out for shampoos and conditioners that contain propylene glycol (PG or PEG). This chemical that is commonly found in your favorite hair care products, is also one of the main ingredients in your car’s antifreeze. Other ingredients such as diethanolamine, monoethanolamine, triethanolamine and sodium lauryl sulfate should be avoided too. These chemicals are linked to cancers and/or skin irritation at the very least.

Directions for Green use:

If you have the time, try making your own shampoo with witch hazel, castile soap and essential oils. If this is not an option, research green product companies that use ingredients kind to your health and your environment. Also, talk to your hair stylist about switching to safer, healthier products when getting your hair done.
Toluene

Formaldehyde

Dibutyl Phthalate
There are three distinct chemicals, called the toxic trio, in most nail polishes. Toluene, formaldehyde, and dibutyl phthalate together can cause health issues varying from leukemia, and brain damage to birth malformations and asthma. On a daily bases humans are unknowingly exposed to these hazardous chemicals that contaminate our air, soil, food and water, accumulating in our bodies. Developmental toxicity; neuro-toxicity; reproductive toxicity; damage to the kidney and liver and respiratory diseases, such as bronchitis, are some of the health problems linked to this toxic trio we unwittingly use on our nails.

Purchase your own toxic-trio-free polish and take it with you to the salon or ask your manicurist/pedicurist for polish that is toxic trio free. Try to patronize salons that are well-ventilated to decrease inhaling other toxic fumes. Remember to use the toxic trio free polish on the top and base coat also.
Plastic Bottles

Bisphenol A
Ingredients - Plastic Bottles

Bisphenol A (BPA) is a chemical found in many household plastics including water bottles, sippy cups and baby bottles. Over 95% of US adults have BPA in their blood stream according to a Center for Disease Control and Prevention study. BPA is the chemical that makes plastic soft and pliable, but it also mimics estrogen in our bodies which could lead to infertility in men, early onset of puberty in girls’ breast, and prostate cancer.

Directions for Green use:

Look for baby bottles that do not contain BPA or opt for chemical free glass baby bottles instead. Reduce your consumption of plastic by taking your own canteen/bottle to the office, use reusable cups and glasses with a pitcher at home and work, or purchase glass bottles or plastic bottles that are BPA free.
Red lipstick can turn the shyest of women into an instant diva. However, some of our favorite red-colored lipsticks contain lead and coloring agents that might send our lipstick-wearing divas to an early grave. One colorant, named coal tar, is a harmful chemical found in many lipsticks as well as lip gloss and eye shadow. This nasty chemical has been linked to several cancers. Lead can cause mental disabilities, infertility, cancer and hinder behavioral development. In addition to lipstick, watch out for lead in the paint of old buildings or in toys. Keep an eye on all your makeup too.

**Ingredients - Lipstick**

Direction for Green use:

Lead is not usually listed on labels and products, so reach for things that say “lead-free”. They might be hard to find, however it’s worth the extra effort. Colorants usually are labeled as D&C and FD&C so try to stay away from those ingredients too. Remember to check out your lip gloss, since many now have an extra boost of color. Don’t forget to warn children about using the makeup. Playing dress up could have dangerous and long-lasting impact.
Toothpaste

Triclosan
Triclosan (Mircoban), biofresh, cloxifenolum and lexol are all industry names for pesticides that can be found in your toothpaste and mouthwash. These chemicals are known carcinogens and linked to adverse health consequences including thyroid issues. (The thyroid is important in child development).

**Directions for green use:**

Turn your toothpaste and mouthwash to the ingredient list and see if it contains any of these chemicals. If it does, chuck it and look for a brand that does not contain all the toxins. Baking soda, hydrogen peroxide and salt water are all safe products to use for dental care and mouthwash. Remember good old-fashioned flossing can go a long way to keep mouths happy, healthy and toxic free.
Pots & Pans

Teflon
Teflon, otherwise known as a perfluorinated compound (PFC), started its life as a lubricant for pipes. PFC is one of the most slippery substances on earth, and after some experimentation, it ended up on our pots and pans to help food slick right off. However, PFC is linked to adverse health issues such as, ovarian cancer, testicle malformation and low sperm count. It’s also linked to an increase risk for kidney and liver disease.

**Directions for green use:**

Use pots, pans and grills that do not contain teflon. Instead just try using a tiny bit of oil and watching the pot to make sure the food doesn’t burn. After the pots are used, soak in water to help with the clean up. Usually dry or burned-on food is what makes cleaning difficult. If you can’t give up your teflon, remember to use non-metal utensils to avoid scraping or scratching the teflon into your food.
Body Soap

Phthalates
Phthalates are the smell-good toxic chemical that are the secret ingredient in many soaps, body washes, perfumes, shampoos and other products that contain fragrance. This chemical often hides under the harmless term of fragrance and is often a trade secret. Unfortunately, phthalates are linked to serious health consequences including reproductive harm, cancer and birth-defects in male genitalia. Male children of mothers who were exposed to this chemical during pregnancy were more likely to have defects in their penis.

**Directions for Green use:**
Look for products that specifically list ingredients and avoid buying products that contain phthalates or the generic fragrance label. Try using products that do not have any scent, or use essential oils as fragrance.
Hand sanitizer can create super germs by destroying both good and bad bacteria on your hands. We live in a society that is increasing its consciousness on the spread of bacteria and other germs, however not all bacteria is bad bacteria. Antibacterial hand sanitizer kills both good, neutral and bad bacteria; but, sometimes it doesn’t kill the super bad bacteria, leaving space so it can grow and take over.

Use antibacterial sanitizer sparingly, and when possible, opt for good ol’ soap and water (remember to wash hands for at least 20 seconds and to make sure to dry them). For more options, check in your local health food store for healthier, on-the-go sanitizer to keep you germ and toxin free.
Sunscreen
At one point in time, nanobyte technology existed only in the science-fiction world. However, fiction has now met reality. Nanotechnology is alive and well, and is used in products at your local grocery store. One of the names for nanobyte technology is zinc oxide, which is found in many sunscreens. The problem with nanobytes is, well, we don’t know what the problem is yet. These particles are so small they work outside the laws of physics. There has been little testing on the health effects of this new technology but it can be found in over 720 consumer products.

Directions for green use:

Use a sunscreen that doesn’t contain zinc oxide, and while you’re at it, make sure it doesn’t have oxybenzone either. Look in your local health food stores for natural sunscreens that do not contain these chemicals. None there? Ask the bigger chains to start carrying safer, healthier products. Finally, try to stay covered up in direct sunlight with large brimmed hats and sunglasses.
Resources and References

California Safe Cosmetics Program http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cosmetics/Pages/default.aspx
Cosmetic Database http://www.cosmeticdatabase.com
Clean Hair, Clean Air http://www.thegreenguide.com/personal-care/clean-hair-clean-air
CHANGE- Californians for Healthy and Green Economy http://www.change-california.org
Friends of the Earth http://www.foe.org
Healthy Nail Collaborative http://www.cahealthynailsalons.org
Locks of Love http://www.locksoflove.org/
Natural Hair Get Creative with Homemade Recipes http://www.pioneer-thinking.com/ep_naturalhair.html
Premature Sexual Development in Children Following the Use of Estrogen or Placenta Containing Hair Products http://cpj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/37/12/733
Recycling Made Easy-Setting up a recycling initiative in the salon http://www.hji.co.uk/blogs/business/2006/12/recycling-made-easy-1.html
The Ugly Side of the Beauty Industry http://www.herizons.ca/node/227

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