

CARING FOR CREATION NEWS

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The Apostle Paul says in Romans that "...sin is not reckoned when there is no law." Think about that for a minute. We may have here the perfect case for ignorance. Why let bad news rob us of happiness, better just not to know. Maybe that's why people put off physicals and medical exams. Ignorance may be a temptation, but the adult part of me knows that it won't work. Undiagnosed tumors grow anyway.

Environmental news brings a lot of unwanted and inconvenient news. Every fiber in me says, "I really didn't want to know that!" Nevertheless we have to decide what to do with what we don't want to know. Here's a reflection from Judi Boogaart in which she works through one of these issues.

-Peter Boogaart, Caring for Creation Coordinator

IT ALL STARTED WITH PARABENS

For years my only criteria for using and buying personal care products were how they performed and what they cost. Then a couple of years ago my friend was diagnosed with breast cancer. In her "why" phase, she started doing a lot of research into possible causes for her disease and came across information about parabens. For the first time I confronted the concept that the products we use to enhance our faces, hair and skin can actually be harming us instead.

Pick up most any popular moisturizer or conditioner and you're almost guaranteed to see some variety of paraben on the label: methyl- propyl- ethyl-butyl- or isodecyl- parabens are common. Parabens have safety concerns in the areas of developmental or reproductive toxicity, endocrine disruptions, and organ system toxicity, yet we freely slather them on and absorb them into our skin and hair every day.

So I went shopping to find lotion without parabens. Not an easy job, although I found one or two that cost quite a bit more than my normal brand. But now I was curious. What about all those other ingredients with unpronounceable chemical names listed on the bottle? How do I know they are safe?

That's the problem – I don't know. Nobody does. Amazingly, there is no FDA regulation of the cosmetic industry in the United States. Cosmetic companies can – and do – put all kinds of questionable ingredients in their products.

There is, however, a website that I have been frequenting of late. It's called Skin Deep Cosmetic Safety Database, sponsored by the Environmental Working Group (EWG) (<http://www.cosmeticdatabase.com/>). It has compared thousands of products to more than 50 definitive databases of known and suspected hazardous ingredients. You can check by product or by ingredient, and find out its "hazard score" on a scale of 1-10.

It's a demanding but illuminating exercise to look up every ingredient on the back of a bottle. And if the hazard score is high, you have to decide: Am I willing to take the risk of using this product? Are there affordable alternatives? And what do I do with the products I don't feel safe using? Give them away? Trash them? (I don't even want to think of the implications of all these ingredients swirling down millions of tub and shower drains into our water supply every day!)

I have signed the petition to Congress on EWG's home page asking for legislation to make our personal products safe. But I'm wondering if in the meantime I should write cosmetic manufacturers to tell them I am not buying from them until they can provide reasonably priced products that are safe to use.

Now that summer has arrived, I have been investigating sunscreens on the database. Four out of 5 name brand sunscreens tested by EWG "offer inadequate protection from the sun, or contain ingredients with significant safety concerns." My mission is to find a low-hazard sunscreen that doesn't cost \$10 an ounce. Wish me luck!