

## Green is the new pink

Contributed by I-Ching Ng  
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Want a healthy manicure? There may be an eco-friendly beauty salon coming to your neighborhood...

Susan Kim, who worked for 17 years as a manicurist, complains of chronic itchiness in her eyes, an allergic reaction to the fumes and dust she inhaled in her

workplace. Another former manicurist, Linda Chen, used to have a bumpy red rash on her face and neck. It finally faded after she quit the job.

As nail workers nationwide experience ailments they assert are caused by the tools of their trade, concerned community groups and health advocates are trying

to strengthen regulations on nail-care products and help promote "greener" nail shops. Entrepreneurs are in on it too. Former model Kim D'Amato opened the

Priti Organic Spa in New York City in 2005 after she stopped getting manicures and pedicures while she was pregnant, fearing that the chemicals used could

harm her unborn child.

D'Amato's salon is just one of several around the country committed to offering nontoxic products in eco-friendly environments. The Nova Nail Spa, which

opened in San Francisco in August, incorporated recycled materials and energy-efficient lighting in its design. So did Recess, which is slated to open in

late October in West Hollywood, Calif.

Going green has become a major trend in the beauty industry, said Sree Roy, senior editor of Nails magazine, a trade publication.

While green salons are great for customers, they offer as many, or more, health benefits to their employees. These technicians often work long hours and thus

risk greater exposure to dangerous products. In June, the Environmental Protection Agency granted \$100,000 to two Seattle nonprofit groups to launch the

Toxic Beauty Project. It's the latest of several EPA initiatives aimed at helping salons reduce toxic exposure and improve ventilation.

"Nail workers tend to work and live in these stores," said Kevin Burrell, executive director of one of the groups, the Environmental Coalition of South

Seattle. He added that his group wants to make sure the workers and their clients "understand the ramifications of the health risks."

The most problematic ingredients in nail products include formaldehyde, dibutyl phthalate (DBP) and toluene. (Comprehensive information on nail products and

their ingredients can be found on the Skin Deep Web site, cosmeticsdatabase.com, sponsored by the Environmental Working Group. It rates cosmetics and

personal-care products and outlines the potential hazards associated with the ingredients.)

In 2005, California passed the Safe Cosmetics Act, which requires manufacturers to disclose ingredients in their products that are on state or federal lists

of chemicals known to cause cancer and birth defects. Formaldehyde, DBP and toluene are among the chemicals that must be reported.

DBP was one of many cosmetic ingredients banned in the European Union in 2004, and several consumer-safety groups have urged U.S. authorities to follow suit.

Currently, the Consumer Product Safety Commission does not regulate nail-care products, which are also not generally subject to premarket approval by the

Food and Drug Administration.

“If there’s a level of doubt, we should review the situation and conduct testing,” said Erin Thompson, regional campaign coordinator of Women’s Voices for

the Earth, an environmental-health organization. “Consumers should not be the guinea pigs.”

Several U.S. manufacturers have since changed their nail products, including OPI Products Inc., which removed DBP and toluene from its nail lacquers. OPI’s

chief operating officer, Eric Schwartz, said he hoped the company can lead the way and change industry practices. “It wasn’t easy to find replacements that

can create the same breadth of colors,” he said, “but we want something positive, and people appreciate that.”

Improving the products is important. So is improving the quality of air circulation in nail salons. According to Dr. George Friedman-Jimenez, director of the

NYU/Bellevue Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic, better ventilation could prevent most of the health problems associated with exposure to nail

products. At Nova Nail Spa in San Francisco, a ventilation system installed in the ceiling helps keep the air fresh. “We don’t have any more paint-shop

smell,” said owner Donald Kim.

Kim has, however, noticed a drawback to using nontoxic nail polishes: fewer color choices. “Things can’t change overnight,” he said, “but we can see

improvements if consumers and salon owners start to demand and pressure the manufacturers to upgrade their products.”

Nova and other green salons, including Recess and Priti, have opted to forgo one traditional salon staple: artificial nails. “Having done all the research, I

realize that doing acrylic is almost a step from using antifreeze,” said Nidhi Lal, owner of Recess.

No one at the Priti spa seems to mind that biodegradable slippers are favored over artificial nails. With fragrant incense lingering in the air, men and

women lounge on handcrafted bamboo furniture in Priti's cozy parlor, which has sage-green walls. As owner D'Amato intended, the salon is a place that

attracts pregnant women-as clients and as staff.

Customer Aarona Pichinson reads a magazine, while technician Marisol Martinez, a mom-to-be, offers her a muscle-relaxing pedicure using products made from

natural ingredients. Meanwhile, patron Jessica Berger Gross, her pregnant belly protruding, receives her regular manicure with Priti's own brand of

acetone-free, soy-based polish remover. None of the women seem to worry that working in the salon or enjoying its services would endanger their own health or

that of their gestating children.

For D'Amato, that's a success. “I don't want pregnant women to face the same dilemma, feeling guilty getting their nails done,” she said.

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