

Invisible News

ISSUE 3

BROUGHT to YOU by the GENEVA CHEMICALS & WASTE CLUSTER at the 4th UN Environment Assembly

11-15 March 2019

CHEMICALS & WASTE in your BATHROOM?

**Cleans well,
smells nice,
but is it also
safe?**

Stop and think for a moment. For the most part, you can't see toxic chemicals, but that doesn't mean they are not there.

Your bathroom is a case in point. It's where every part of your body comes into contact with toiletries and hygienic products, shampoos, soaps, toothpaste.

Do you know what's in those products? Do you know whether they are doing more harm than good? Not all toiletries contain toxic chemicals. But some certainly do.

Lindane, a persistent organic pollutant (POP) listed under the Stockholm Convention and known to be toxic with adverse effects on the immune system, reproductive system and development, was until recently commonly used as active ingredient in anti-headlice shampoos. Whilst there is no information about current production, it is reported that many articles in use still contain this chemical.

Do you have a mercury thermometer in your bathroom cabinet? If it breaks, that mercury, however pretty and playful it appears, is dangerous. Mercury is a highly toxic heavy metal that poses a global threat to human health and the environment. Together with its various compounds, it has a range of severe health impacts, including damage to the central nervous system, thyroid, kidneys, lungs, immune system, eyes, gums and skin. There is no known safe exposure level for elemental mercury in humans, and effects can be seen even at very low levels.

Your bathroom may well contain not just lindane and mercury, but a veritable cocktail of other potentially hazardous ingredients including nonylphenol ethoxylates, benzene, formaldehyde, chloroform, toluene, plus microbeads and nanomaterials in toiletries which end up as pollution in our oceans.



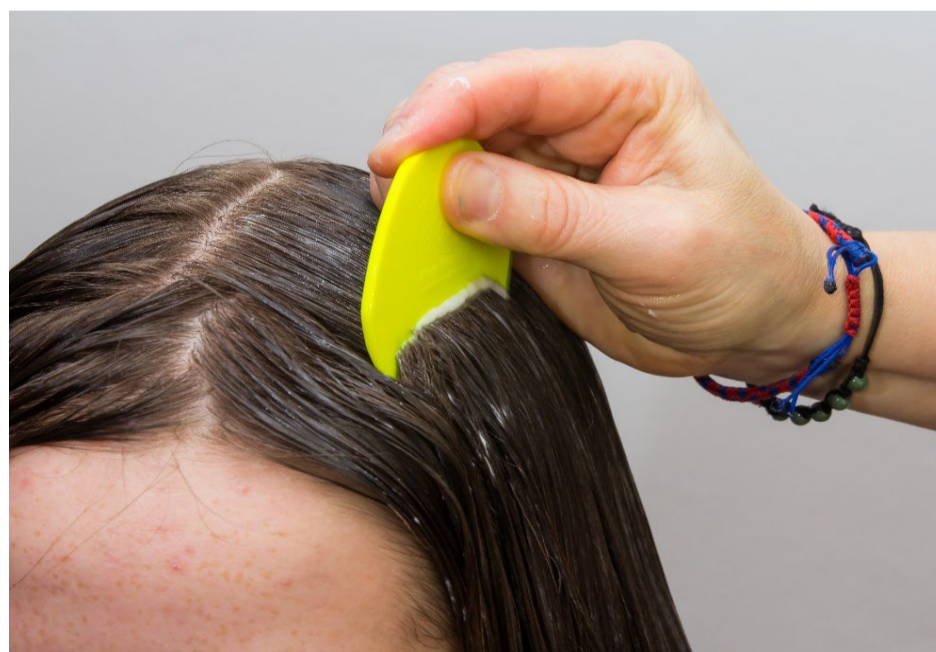
It's good to know whether your toiletries, cosmetics, and household cleaning products contain potentially harmful substances

Making the Invisible, Visible

The Geneva Chemicals and Waste Cluster is a group of international organisations in Geneva which collectively work to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals and waste. This lounge area installation is brought to you by four organisations of this cluster, namely:

- Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, & Stockholm Conventions (BRS);
- Secretariat of the Minamata Convention on Mercury;
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM); and
- UN Environment, Chemicals and Health Branch (UNEP)

See www.brsmeas.org www.mercuryconvention.org www.saicm.org and www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/chemicals-waste for more info



Fortunately, alternatives exist for most of these potentially harmful substances. In the case of lindane, for example, smothering the hair with coconut oil works well for many people to eradicate troublesome headlice

**Make your
bathroom
safe: it's
easily done!**

The good thing is, that there are usually safer alternatives to all of these toxic chemicals. As shown in the photo below, non-chemical shampoos, or plain and simple coconut oil, are said to work just as well in getting rid of headlice.

The same principle applies to most other toiletries and hygiene products. Choosing a shampoo or shower gel which doesn't contain these chemicals will safeguard your health and choosing one which doesn't contain plastic microbeads will reduce the amount of microplastics entering our oceans and then – through fish and other organisms – entering our food chain and possibly ending up in our stomachs.

Replacing your mercury thermometers with a digital version, widely available on the market in most places, is also an easy step to take. And if an old mercury thermometer breaks, don't let your children play with it!

When cleaning your bathroom and toilet areas, consider using ecological-based cleaning products rather than chemical-based ones. Not only are these often cheaper, they are also less likely to harm you or the environment. Great results can be obtained from cleaning with dilutions of white vinegar, or regular baking soda, or borax.

Safeguard your bathroom: protect your health and the environment!

What can you do?

- Read the next *Invisible News* sheets to educate yourself about the hazards;
- Visit the websites listed to find out more;
- Seek out safe alternatives when buying toiletries, food, clothing, furniture: READ the labelling;
- Discuss with your children, relatives, neighbours.



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