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Dirty little beauty secrets

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Elizabeth Arden Ceramide Plump Perfect Moisture Cream SPF 30 and Skin Success Eventone Fade Cream for Oily Skin might have fancy names, but according to a new study released in Montana this week by the non-profit group Women's Voices for the Earth in conjunction with the Washington D.C.-based Environmental Working Group (EWG), these beauty products contain something less promising as well: previously unstudied ingredients linked to health issues such as cancer, pregnancy problems and skin irritations.

The six-month study, conducted by EWG, assessed the health and safety of over 10,000 ingredients used in personal care products. Eighty-nine percent of those ingredients, the group found, have not been evaluated by the cosmetic industry's Cosmetic Ingredient Review (CIR) panel, the FDA's Office of Cosmetics and Colors, or any other review board.

"We all have this trust," says EWG's Communication Director Lauren Sucher, "that if something appears on a [product's] label-even 'dermatologist tested'-that they have to prove it to someone, but they don't."

Thus, EWG's own investigation. The group compared the ingredients in 7,497 personal care products against government and industry lists of known or suspected chemical health hazards. Then they created a 1 through 10 ranking system, with 10s going to those products containing the most potentially harmful ingredients. The results can now be accessed in a user-friendly database at www.ewg.org/reports/skindeep. Just type in the name of the soap, moisturizer or toothpaste you use, and see what number comes up:

Olay Total Effects Moisturizing Vitamin Complex, UV Protection: 8.9, with two potential cancer-risk ingredients.

Dove Beauty Bar Soap, white: 6.7, with one potential cancer-risk ingredient.

According to the group's study, an average adult uses nine personal care products each day, with over 100 unique chemical ingredients; more than 25 percent of women, and about one out of every 100 men, use at least 15 products a day. But of the 7,497 products EWG studied, just 28 were found to be fully assessed for safety by CIR. Makes you wonder about the price of being clean.