



# WHAT'S GOING ON

## with Feminine Care Products?

### Tiny Exposures Can Add Up

At the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, we make it a top priority to provide you with information on exposure to toxic and untested chemicals in personal care products—from shampoo to makeup to fragrances. We often talk about why the timing of exposure matters and why cumulative exposures matter. Industry spokespeople often claim “it’s just a little bit” of a toxic chemical in a given product, and that a little bit can’t hurt. But when there are carcinogens in the bathtub, hormone disruptors in soaps and fragrances, and traces of toxic chemicals in food, air, water and other consumer goods, it all adds up—and the sum could harm our health. One concerning source of toxic exposures that we don’t often hear about is the products we put *inside* of our bodies: feminine care products like tampons.

### Tampons and Toxic Chemicals

About 43 million women in the United States use tampons.<sup>1</sup> A woman who uses tampons monthly will buy more than 11,000 in her lifetime. You would think that there would be ample ingredient and safety information about such an intimate and often-used product, but there isn’t. As with cosmetics, feminine-care product manufacturers aren’t required to tell you what’s in their products. Unfortunately, tampons may contain traces of dioxin from bleach, pesticide residues from conventional, non-organic cotton, and mystery “fragrance” ingredients. Let’s take a closer look.

### Dioxin

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says that tampons are safe, and that “dioxin levels are at or below the detectable limit.”<sup>2</sup> However, even trace levels are concerning because dioxins are cancer-causing agents;<sup>3</sup> can disrupt the hormone system;<sup>4</sup> have been linked to endometriosis;<sup>5</sup> and can affect the body at very low levels.<sup>6</sup> The amount of dioxin in our bodies is already above the “safe” limits.<sup>7</sup> (The majority of our exposure comes from eating meat, dairy products, eggs and fish because the chemical builds up over time in animals and in us.) The World Health Organization states that “reducing dioxin exposure is an important public health goal for disease reduction.”<sup>8</sup> And another (pretty obvious) reason for concern: tampons come in contact with some of the most sensitive and absorbent tissue in our bodies.



For a full list of references, visit [www.safecosmetics.com/femininecare](http://www.safecosmetics.com/femininecare)

## Pesticides

According to Pesticide Action Network, cotton growers use some of the most hazardous pesticides in use today,<sup>9</sup> and the World Health Organization has classified many cotton pesticides as “extremely or highly hazardous.”<sup>10</sup> These pesticides have been linked to infertility, neurological dysfunction and developmental defects. Pesticides can adversely affect the health of cotton workers and those living near cotton fields, and seven of the top 15 pesticides used on cotton are classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as possible, likely, probable or known human carcinogens.<sup>11</sup> It’s clear that conventional cotton production is harmful to the planet and to workers, but what about to women who use tampons—for days and days every month—made with this cotton? Are there traces of pesticides in tampons? We don’t know, because the FDA does not require companies to test for harmful chemicals or to disclose their presence. The FDA just *recommends* that tampons be free of pesticide and herbicide residues.<sup>12</sup>

## So, What's a Girl to Do?

While there is a lack of data on health effects associated with continued use of conventional tampons, we think that erring on the side of caution whenever possible makes sense. The good news is, we can switch to products that are better for the environment and likely safer for us, and we can tell companies and elected officials that we want *all* of the products we use in and on our bodies to be safe! There are feminine care options free of bleach, pesticides and toxic chemicals, including organic, unbleached tampons and pads made by Seventh Generation and Natracare, cloth pads, and silicone and natural rubber cups (like DivaCup and the Keeper).

## Fragrance

Just as with cosmetics, the “fragrance” in your tampons may contain dozens of chemical ingredients. Because the formulas are considered trade secrets, companies don’t have to disclose what’s in fragrance. We know from product-testing that fragrance may contain allergens, sensitizers, phthalates (a class of chemicals that has been linked to hormone disruption, which can affect development and fertility), neurotoxins and synthetic musks (which can also disrupt hormones). Secret chemicals linked to skin irritation and reproductive harm... in a tampon?



For more information or to get involved in making sure what we put on and in our bodies is safe and non-toxic, visit [www.safecosmetics.org/femininecare](http://www.safecosmetics.org/femininecare).

## The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics

[www.SafeCosmetics.org](http://www.SafeCosmetics.org)

**The Campaign for Safe Cosmetics** is a national coalition of health and environmental groups working to protect the health of consumers and workers by requiring the health and beauty industry to phase out the use of chemicals linked to cancer, birth defects and other serious health concerns—and replace them with safe alternatives.