

Personal Care Products FAQ

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Does PCC have standards for the personal care products it sells?

Absolutely. We believe the safety of personal care products is just as important as the food we eat. There are thousands of chemicals used in conventional personal care products and at PCC, we know it can be challenging and time consuming to research and learn all of them to avoid purchasing unsafe products. That's why all the ingredients in the personal care products on our shelves are screened against list of [unacceptable ingredients](#). There are also some ingredients permitted with certain restrictions on ingredient sourcing and production methods, such as genetically engineered (GE) or synthetic.

Our goal is that you can shop our stores knowing our products have been screened and verified against our standards, so you can choose products with peace of mind. Read the full Personal Care Products Standard [here](#).

Why are there so many harmful chemicals in many personal care products?

Companies use synthetic chemicals, which are human-made compounds often derived from petroleum or coal, because they are cheaper than natural materials, easier to formulate, and sometimes perform better or can perform functions natural materials cannot.¹ By using cheap petroleum-based synthetic ingredients, companies can mass produce shampoos that are inexpensive at the check-out counter, but do not take into account the cost born by the environment and people in using those products.

How can I reduce the packaging from my personal care products?

Packaging is a serious concern for personal care products, like any other consumer good, but it is not just the responsibility of the consumer to change their own behavior. Manufacturers must address their packaging practices and governments must pass meaningful legislation and policy to shift our society to better packaging options.

That being said, there are a number of actions consumers can take. First, choose products that are packaged in cardboard, aluminum, or glass to reduce plastic use. Opting for concentrates or solid version of products can reduce waste because less packaging is needed to store those items. Glass jars that can be reused are a great option to reduce packaging. Another option is buying in bulk with reusable containers. PCC is working hard to expand our bulk personal care offerings and move towards a [closed-loop system](#) with our bulk suppliers, as there can be hidden waste behind many bulk programs.

On the end-of-use side, there are new recycling services appearing every day that are finding innovative methods to recycle more materials, rather than sending them to landfills. [Ridwell](#), for example, is an independent recycling service that picks up from your house. [Terracycle](#) is another company that partners with businesses to implement take-back programs and help recycle products and materials that are notoriously difficult to recycle, like disposable razors and plastic squeeze tubes. Some brands sold at PCC, including Acure, Burt's Bees, and Weleda, have already developed take-back programs with Terracycle or have their own send-back recycling programs.

What does it mean if a product is “organic”?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP) certifies and regulates organically grown crops or agricultural products. A personal care product that is certified organic contains ingredients that are considered agricultural crops and have been grown following organic regulations. It also means that the processing and handling of that product was done in accordance with organic regulations. If a personal care product contains 95% agriculturally produced, organic certified ingredients, then it can display the USDA organic seal. For more information, visit the USDA’s page on [personal care products and organic regulations](#).

Are non-toxic or organic body care products completely chemical-free?

No. Chemicals can be found in natural and organic products. The difference is whether the chemical is harmful to humans or the environment. Natural and organic products will usually contain fewer synthetic chemicals and potentially harmful ingredients.ⁱⁱ

Why doesn’t PCC sell spray sunscreens?

PCC decided to stop selling spray and aerosol sunscreens before the summer of 2020 in response to existing and new research about potential health risks. Current evidence suggests the particles in spray sunscreens, specifically mineral-based, become aerosolized and can be easily inhaled, especially by children.ⁱⁱⁱ Some research indicates that if those particles penetrate deeply, they could potentially cause damage to lung tissue.^{iv,v} There may be other potential health effects of spray sunscreen as well. The International Agency for Research on Cancer lists titanium dioxide as a possible human carcinogen when inhaled. (When applied topically in a lotion, it is considered safe.) Beyond that, additional research indicates that spray sunscreens are not as effective as ones applied topically in the form of a cream or lotion.^{vi,vii} To learn more, see our *Sound Consumer* article, [Choosing a Safe Sunscreen](#).

Why does PCC sell hair dye that is exempt from many of the ingredient standards?

PCC has debated internally for many years on whether to discontinue boxed hair dye, as it requires being exempt from some of our ingredient prohibitions. We continue selling hair dye because we know there are many shoppers who appreciate us selling it. The hair dyes that PCC sells are free of many toxic chemicals used heavily in conventional boxed hair dye, such as artificial fragrances, dyes, and certain petroleum-based ingredients.^{viii} There are, however, certain ingredients with health concerns that are essential to the functionality of permanent hair dyes, but the brands PCC carries work hard to limit these ingredients to only the essentials and in the smallest quantities necessary. This way, if our shoppers choose to dye their hair, we are providing the safest available options on the market.

Does PCC sell white sage or other plants sacred with indigenous peoples?

PCC stopped selling white sage and sweetgrass bundles, and white sage essential oil, in the spring of 2021 after evaluating the potential impacts on certain indigenous cultures. PCC works hard to ensure our products are ethically sourced, sustainable, and not exploitative of indigenous cultures. We will continue to listen and learn concerning our products and any other items that may hold cultural or religious significance and determine best practices on a case-by-case basis.

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- ⁱ Jarek Tabor, “The Challenges Of Formulating Natural Products,” HAPPI, November 2, 2016, https://www.happi.com/issues/2016-11-01/view_formulator-forum/the-challenges-of-formulating-natural-products/.
- ⁱⁱ Scott Faber, “The Toxic Twelve Chemicals and Contaminants in Cosmetics,” Environmental Working Group, May 5, 2020, <https://www.ewg.org/the-toxic-twelve-chemicals-and-contaminants-in-cosmetics>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ “EWG’s Guide to Safer Sunscreens: The Trouble with Ingredients in Sunscreens,” Environmental Working Group, 2021, <https://www.ewg.org/sunscreen/report/the-trouble-with-sunscreen-chemicals/>.
- ^{iv} “Sunscreen Drug Products for Over-the-Counter Human Use,” Federal Register, February 26, 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/02/26/2019-03019/sunscreen-drug-products-for-over-the-counter-human-use>.
- ^v W. Steiling et al., “Principle Considerations for the Risk Assessment of Sprayed Consumer Products,” *Toxicology Letters* 227, no. 1 (May 16, 2014): 41–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.toxlet.2014.03.005>.
- ^{vi} Jerome Barr, “Spray-on Sunscreens Need a Good Rub,” *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* 52, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 180–81, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaad.2004.05.047>.
- ^{vii} Karyn Repinski, “The Right Way to Use Spray Sunscreen,” Consumer Reports, May 5, 2019, <https://www.consumerreports.org/sunscreens/right-way-to-use-spray-sunscreen/>.
- ^{viii} “Toxic Chemicals in Hair Dye and Safer Options,” MADE SAFE, January 19, 2018, <https://www.madesafe.org/toxic-chemicals-hair-dye-safer-options/>.