

# New Study finds Nearly 70% of Companies Surveyed Have Improved Toxic Chemical Safety Programs

*Mind the Store's Retailer Report Card evaluates the chemical policies and practices of 50 retail chains covering more than 200,000 stores in the U.S. & Canada.*

WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES, March 30, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A [new report released today](#) by the Mind the Store campaign finds significant chemical policy improvement with nearly 70% of companies surveyed having better chemical safety programs now compared to their first evaluation dating as far back as 2016. The study also finds that, in an unprecedented move in the history of the report, Target and Rite Aid will address racial injustice and health inequity by committing to screening beauty products marketed to women of color for toxic chemicals. Additionally, 12 major retailers with more than 65,000 stores worldwide have now pledged to eliminate or reduce toxic PFAS "forever chemicals" in food packaging.

The report results show significant improvement over time. Nearly 70% of companies surveyed have improved their grade compared to their first evaluation in the retailer report card. "We applaud retail leaders for stepping up to drive harmful chemicals out of consumer products and packaging," explains report co-author and Mind the Store campaign director Mike Schade. "Despite a global pandemic and incredibly challenging year, retailers have continued to make substantial progress in reducing and eliminating classes of toxic chemicals like PFAS."

The study finds six retailers with high grades, scoring A- or above. For the first time, Sephora and Whole Foods Market were awarded A grades and joined consistent high performers Apple and Target, each with an A+, and IKEA and Walmart, each with an A-.

This year's analysis finds the lowest-ever percentage of retailers with F scores, with only 12 out of 50 receiving failing grades. Companies with failing grades include 7-Eleven, 99 Cents Only Stores, Ace Hardware, Alimentation Couche-Tarde (Circle K, Couche-Tard), Metro, Nordstrom, Publix, Restaurant Brands International (Burger King, Tim Hortons, Popeyes), Sally Beauty, Sobeys, Starbucks, and Subway. "There is really no excuse for these retail laggards to earn a failing grade," says report co-author and Defend Our Health executive director Mike Belliveau. "Retailers that are not properly managing chemical risks can lose the trust of their customers, lose market share to competitors, and may even risk facing significant financial and regulatory liabilities."

In an unprecedented move in the history of the report card, two retailers have now committed to evaluating beauty products marketed to women of color for toxic chemicals found in those types of products, which helps address long-standing racial injustice and health inequity. Target and Rite Aid will specifically screen for toxic chemicals that are often found in these products, such as skin lightening cream and hair straighteners and relaxers. This follows the addition of new criteria in the report that challenges retailers to address this racial justice issue. Whole Foods Market has already banned some of these chemicals of concern (such as hydroquinone) in these products as well.

“We applaud Target and Rite Aid for taking a leadership role in pledging to screen for toxic chemicals that are often found in beauty products marketed to women, and we hope that other retailers will follow their example,” said Taylor Morton, director of environmental health and education at WE ACT for Environmental Justice. [“Research shows that](#) women of color have higher levels of toxic chemicals related to beauty products in their bodies, and this is linked to higher incidences of cancer, poor infant and maternal health outcomes, learning disabilities, obesity, asthma, and other serious health concerns. Reducing exposure to toxic chemicals in beauty and other personal care products will help address this critical but often overlooked environmental justice issue that contributes to the disproportionately higher cumulative exposure to toxics in communities of color.”

“Availability of safe and affordable consumer products marketed to Black women is an environmental justice issue,” explains Dr. Maida Galvez, a professor in environmental medicine and public health & pediatrics at Mount Sinai. “Women need to know that products on the marketplace are free of harmful chemicals that can affect their health or their pregnancy. This can have a real and meaningful impact in preventing and reducing harmful exposures to millions of people across the United States.”

The beauty and personal care sector reported among the greatest gains of any retail sector overall. Ulta Beauty was the most improved retailer in the last year, earning a C- grade as compared with its F result in 2019. And, Sephora has shown the greatest improvement over time, receiving an A grade, up from a D when first evaluated in 2017.

The study finds that corporate bans and restrictions around toxic PFAS “forever chemicals” in food packaging have grown considerably since years past. The report now finds 12 retailers now pledge to eliminate or reduce PFAS in food packaging, which impacts more than 65,000 stores worldwide. Meanwhile, some major fast-food and grocery retailers, such as Burger King and Kroger, have not taken action on PFAS in food packaging. “The movement to ban PFAS started in Washington state and now the dominos are falling in the marketplace and other states. This is creating a perfect storm for ending the use of PFAS in food packaging,” explains Toxic-Free Future executive director Laurie Valeriano.

Dollar stores won “most improved” retail sector overall in the report as compared to last year. Dollar Tree (including Family Dollar) improved from a D+ to a C+. Dollar General earned a C-

grade, making progress from its D grade in 2019. "We are pleased to see dollar stores starting to take seriously the need to phase out harmful chemicals from their products," said José T. Bravo, national coordinator for the Campaign for Healthier Solutions. "Still, they have a long way to go. People of color and low-income communities are already over-exposed to toxic chemicals. Especially during this pandemic, these stores should be going above and beyond to protect their employees and customers."

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