

Washington becomes first state in the nation to ban all formaldehyde-releasing chemicals in cosmetics

Toxic-Free Future applauds landmark ban on cancer-causing chemicals in cosmetics to protect health

SEATTLE, WA, UNITED STATES, August 28, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, Washington became the first state in the nation to adopt a [comprehensive ban](#) on all formaldehyde-releasing chemicals in cosmetics.



The Washington Department of Ecology adopted a rule banning chemicals that can release formaldehyde in cosmetics and personal care products. The rule lists 25 formaldehyde-releasing chemicals and further restricts all formaldehyde releasers that are intentionally added.

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“Washington is leading the way by banning these cancer-causing chemicals in products like skin cream, hair styling gels, and eye lash glue. By taking this action, Washington state is putting the health of people first,” said Cheri Peele, director of government and market policy at Toxic-Free Future. “Safer solutions are available, and we expect this landmark action to prompt the reformulation of products sold throughout the United States.”

Formaldehyde is a known carcinogen linked to leukemia, nose and throat cancer, asthma, and skin irritations. In 2023, testing by Washington’s Department of Ecology found high levels of formaldehyde in lotions, creams, and

hair products, many of which were marketed to women of color. Hair and nail salon workers face some of the greatest risks due to daily exposure on the job.

“Washington State continues to lead in reducing dangerous chemical exposures,” said Brandi

Hyatt, cosmetologist. "This rule is a big step forward in protecting people's health and safety, and it's the kind of commonsense progress everyone can get behind."

Washington state adopted the Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act in 2023, sponsored by Rep. Sharlett Mena (D-29,Tacoma). As a result, a ban went into effect on formaldehyde in cosmetics and personal care products January 2025. The law also directed the Department of Ecology to adopt a rule to ban all formaldehyde releasing chemicals intentionally added to cosmetics and personal care products. The adopted rule will take effect January 1, 2027, and allow in-state retailers to sell existing stock until December 31, 2027.

"This ban is a victory for science, health, and justice," said Dr. Ami Zota, tenured Associate Professor of environmental health sciences at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. "Formaldehyde and formaldehyde-releasers are well-documented hazards that no one should be exposed to in the products they use every day. This action especially matters for women of color and salon workers who face the highest exposures – and it should inspire policymakers across the country to take similar steps to protect their communities."

Highlights of the rule include:

Comprehensive ban: A ban on all "intentionally added" formaldehyde releasers added to cosmetics and personal care products. The rule defines an "intentionally added chemical" as one that serves an intended function in the final cosmetic product or an ingredient in the final cosmetic product. To help businesses comply, the rule includes a list of 25 commonly used formaldehyde releasers. However, the restriction applies to all formaldehyde releasers, not just those on Ecology's list.

Strong enforcement: Robust enforcement by presuming that any detected formaldehyde was intentionally added, ensuring accountability across the industry.

Timeline: Compliance by 2027, giving companies time to reformulate while ensuring protections are not delayed. With safer alternatives already available, this timeline is both feasible and swift.

"WE ACT for Environmental Justice applauds the Washington Department of Ecology for their leadership and the advocates that made this possible," said Mae Kennedy, WE ACT's Global Advocacy and Environmental Health Fellow. "This ban will give all consumers access to safer cosmetics while also addressing the poor health outcomes faced especially by Black women as a result of racist, Eurocentric beauty standards that encourage chemical hair straightening. Here in New York, we are advancing the Beauty Justice Act to ban the most dangerous chemicals in personal care products, including formaldehyde releasers."

The 2024 Retailer Report Card found that major retailers including Sephora, Target, and Ulta Beauty have already taken steps in recent years to restrict these chemicals in private-brand

products and offer more beauty and personal care products without formaldehyde-releasing chemicals, proving that safer solutions are widely available and cost-effective.

Press Statement: <https://toxicfreefuture.org/press-room/washington-becomes-first-state-in-the-nation-to-ban-all-formaldehyde-releasing-chemicals-in-cosmetics/>

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Stephanie Stohler

Toxic-Free Future

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