



Animal Testing of Household Products

Staying ahead of the competition is the Number One priority for household product manufacturers. This is what generates the endless torrent of new 'improved' versions of everything from washing powders and air fresheners to floor cleaners and paints.

What is concealed from the public is the cruelty involved in the production process. Animals are still subjected to horrific tests during the testing phase of all new household products, food additives, agricultural and industrial chemicals. 97,743 animals were used for such purposes in 2001. New products mean more animal tests – yet many thousands of ingredients are already available for manufacturers to choose from – how many more do we need?

Consumer pressure has achieved important progress on cosmetics testing (see Animal Aid's Cosmetics Factfile). With your help, animal testing of household products can be consigned to history.

Risks to human health cannot be established by using animals. Even short-term dangers like poisoning and skin or eye irritation manifest themselves very differently in different species - no animal test result can predict what will happen in another species. For example, bleach causes severe irritation to human skin, but only mild irritation to rabbit skin.¹

Human eyes are 18 times more sensitive to CS gas and 90 times more sensitive to CR gas than rabbit eyes.²

Consumers endangered

Of course, everyone knows that cleaning products are corrosive by nature and should be used with care – no amount of animal testing will ever make it safe to drink disinfectant or use floor cleaner as toothpaste. The doses given to the animals are far greater than any dose humans would be exposed to in real life - so can the results really tell us anything?

Far more worrying are the possible chronic health problems posed by long-term exposure to chemicals in the products which, these days, saturate our environment. Conditions such as cancer, certain allergies and neurological disorders take years to emerge, making the initial cause very difficult to identify. It is clearly impossible to assess these effects in animals, as their life-span is so much shorter than our own. But even if they lived as long as us, animals are genetically and biochemically different from people – they absorb, metabolise and excrete chemicals differently and,

therefore, can never predict how a chemical will affect people.

Yet this is the very assumption on which all animal safety-testing is based. The whole concept is scientifically bogus, not to mention immensely cruel, and its continued practice puts human health and safety in jeopardy. It would be far more scientifically sound to use epidemiology, i.e. studying the effects on people who have been exposed to chemicals naturally.

Which tests are carried out on animals?

Acute and repeat dose toxicity tests

Animals (mainly rats, mice and dogs) are usually force-fed a substance in varying doses through a long tube direct to the stomach – a deeply unpleasant procedure in itself. Effects of each dose are recorded – including any diarrhoea, vomiting, convulsions, bloody tears, breathing difficulties, etc. This may last for days or even months. The information gained has no relevance for any species other than the one under study, and indeed it has been found that results can differ within the same species depending on age, sex, housing, food etc. (Gerhard Zbinden, advisor of the World Health Organisation 1981). In 2002, the notorious LD50 test was finally banned for non-pharmaceutical chemical testing, after decades of campaigning. But the replacement poisoning tests (the fixed dose test and the up & down method) are barely more scientific or humane, though they do use fewer animals. This is a step in the right direction, of course, but the real answer to understanding acute toxicity is to use in vitro tests (such as the neutral red uptake assay or the silicon microphysiometer test) on human tissues. Results would be much faster, cheaper and, most importantly, applicable to people.



Skin irritancy and allergy tests

The test substance is applied to the shaved/scratched backs of rabbits or guinea-pigs. Any swelling, redness, inflammation, cracking or ulceration over one to two weeks is recorded. Pain relief is almost never given. Yet rabbits are a very poor predictor of human dermal response.³ Additionally, shaving the skin means that there is already an initial irritation on top of the chemical irritation - something that wouldn't be there in humans. An excellent artificial human skin (Corrositex)⁴ has been developed, in addition to



©PETA

the possibility of using in vitro skin fragments, both of which provide far more accurate and reliable results.

Eye irritancy tests

The infamous Draize test, where chemicals are dripped into rabbits' eyes, is still in use. This is despite the fact that superior methods have been available for years, including artificial corneas,⁵ and eye cells grown in culture. Rabbits' eyes are monitored for 21 days for reddening, swelling or ulceration. Rabbits, it should be noted, have fewer tear ducts than our own, so they are unable to 'cry out' noxious substances as we do. Similarly, they have no blink reflex and are therefore unable to 'blink out' the chemicals. This inevitably causes them excruciating pain.



©PETA

Animal tests are dangerous for people

Experts agree that more than 80% of cancers are linked to environmental chemicals, including pesticides and other substances in our diet and atmosphere. A survey of dozens of common consumer products from supermarkets found more than half of them to be seriously mutagenic (cause genetic mutations). The tests were conducted on human DNA by French scientific association Pro Anima (www.proanima.asso.fr). These effects had apparently gone unnoticed in the animal tests, which are clearly putting consumers at risk due to their inability to predict human hazards.

A recent book; *Cleaning Yourself To Death: How safe is your home?* by Pat Thomas (Gill & MacMillan, 2001) alerts us to the dangers of using toxic chemicals in the home. Nearly all household products, including things we use on a day-to-day basis, contain

cancer-inducing or brain-altering substances. One in five people suffer from allergic reactions to these products, mainly due to the chemicals used in the fragrance.

Worryingly, manufacturers of household products have no obligation to reveal their

ingredients, which is perhaps why so many people are unaware of these dangers. See below for alternatives to everyday products.

EU chemical testing programme

The European Commission plans to test at least 30,000 chemicals for their human and environmental safety. This is a good idea in theory, although public safety is ultimately served by curbing the prolific use of chemicals by industry and agriculture. Unfortunately, it is proposed that a vast number of animals be consumed for this



©PETA

testing programme. Such an outcome would be a disaster for human health as well as for the animals concerned – approximately 50 million of them – the biggest poisoning programme in European history. Many of these

chemicals have been tested on animals before, despite government claims to the contrary. The problem is that particular companies own the rights to the information and won't share it. If data were more widely accessible, this testing programme would be avoided (although it is still worth noting that this would not make the data any more accurate).

This is a historic opportunity to implement the superior scientific non-animal testing methods already available, to the enormous benefit of both animals and people. See www.StopEUChemicalTests.com or contact the BUAV (020 7700 4888) for a campaign pack.

Which products are cruelty free?

The five main producers of household products are Proctor & Gamble, Lever Brothers, S.C. Johnson, Reckitt & Colman and Colgate-Palmolive. They are responsible for producing the vast majority of products we see on our shelves, including Ariel,

Fairy, Daz, Lenor, Mr Muscle and many more. Their adverts typically show idyllic soft-focus scenes of happy children running in flower-filled meadows. But behind the façade lies terrible suffering - all five companies are involved in animal experiments.

What of the supermarkets' own-brand versions of these products?

Each of the main chains has developed public positions on household products and animal testing. However, the problem is one of transparency and verification. There is a serious shortage of both in relation to this issue. Nonetheless, Animal Aid put a series of questions on household product testing to the main store chains. We set out below how they responded.

Co-op – operate a fixed cut-off date of 1985. *[On questions of cruelty-free ingredients and testing of final products the Co-op has the best record.]*

Sainsbury's – they state that they 'do not commission any animal testing and also do not allow our suppliers to commission animal testing...on raw materials or finished products on our behalf'. However, they do not have a FCOD, as they wish to continue using new raw materials.

Tesco – they state 'Tesco do not conduct any testing on animals, nor do we commission any tests, or allow our product manufacturers to conduct such tests on our behalf'. However, they do not have a FCOD, as they feel it is unnecessary given the above statement.

Safeway – they do not carry out animal testing on finished products or ingredients, and they do not allow their suppliers to do so. They do not have a FCOD, but are looking possibly to adopt one in the future.

Somerfield – operate a FCOD of 2000

All supermarkets were asked the following questions:

Do you carry out any animal testing on finished products or the ingredients that go into them?

- Do you contract any third parties to conduct animal testing on finished products or ingredients?
- If neither of the above, do you subscribe to a five year rolling rule, or a fixed cut-off date?
- If you have a fixed cut-off date, what is it?

Waitrose – they state 'we do not test products on animals nor are our own-label products tested on animals'. However, they are willing to use new ingredients, which have been tested on animals by law.

Asda – they state 'we do not carry out any animal testing on finished household products or the ingredients that go into them – we do not contract any third parties to do this either.' However, they do not have a FCOD.

Marks & Spencer – they state 'we disagree with the testing of cosmetics and toiletries on animals. We do not commission any animal testing either directly or through our suppliers'.

Superdrug – they do not carry out animal testing on finished products or ingredients, and they do not allow their suppliers to do so. However, they do not have a FCOD.

Boots – they state 'no animal testing of any kind is undertaken or commissioned by the Boots Company or its subsidiary businesses.' However, they do not have a FCOD, and are prepared to use ingredients that have been tested on animals by others.



Some companies selling ethical products

The following companies all run a mail order service offering various household cleaning products, all of which implement a fixed cut-off date (FCOD), and contain no animal derived ingredients:

Animal Aid recommends **Honesty** (FCOD 1976): Lumford Mill, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1GS. Tel:01629 814888. www.honestycosmetics.co.uk.

Bio-D (FCOD 1983)
Tel:01482 229950, email:
bio-d@ecodet.karoo.co.uk

Clear Spring (FCOD 1988): Tel:0161 764 2555

The Little Green Shop (FCOD 1979): Tel:01273 508126

All of the products produced by these companies are suitable for vegans.

Non-toxic alternatives

You could always try making your own household cleaning products. This will save animals and detoxify your home (and save you a lot of money!) Here are some ideas:

Washing powder: mix 1 cup of finely grated soap, 1 cup of washing soda, and 2 tsp of lavender oil

Fabric conditioner: soak herbs in white wine vinegar
Alternatively, buy a 'Wash-It laundry ball' for £9.50 (eg. from www.lakelandlimited.co.uk) to replace washing powder and conditioner altogether – it really works!!!

Stain remover: washing soda removes tea, fruit juice and blood. For oil, rub white chalk into the stain before laundering

Scouring powder: bicarbonate of soda can be used for sinks and baths ('Astonish' paste [also available from Lakeland] is quite astonishing!)

Window cleaner: vinegar

Floor cleaner: washing soda crystals in water

Oven/microwave cleaner: mix baking soda and water to form a paste

Furniture polish: mix three parts olive oil and one part vinegar, or one part lemon juice and two parts olive oil. Use a soft cloth

Silverware polish: apply bicarbonate of soda paste with a damp sponge or soft cloth

Air freshener: leave opened box of bicarb soda in the room or add cloves and cinnamon to boiling water

For clogged drains: pour 1/2cup bicarbonate soda, then 1/2 cup vinegar down the drain.

NB. Bicarbonate of soda is the same as baking soda. Washing soda is sodium carbonate (can usually be bought or ordered from supermarkets).

The main cruelty-free policies are:

Fixed cut-off date:

This means a firm's products or ingredients haven't been tested on animals after a specific date. The longer ago the cut-off date, the more ethical the product. Animal Aid believes that this is the best cruelty-free policy.

Five year rolling rule:

This means the product does not contain any ingredients that have been tested in the previous five years. However, since a product can take several years to come to market, this policy is only a mild inconvenience to companies intent on continuing their use of animals. Ecover applies this policy.

Final word:

The evidence referred to in this factsheet provides a strong case for the abolition of household product experiments on animals. A number of companies have managed it, which proves that it can be done. With increased public pressure and awareness, other companies will inevitably follow their lead.

A voluntary UK ban was placed on cosmetic testing, on the grounds that the suffering could not be justified given the trivial nature of the products. (Despite this, there is no ban on selling products in the UK that have been tested abroad). Household product testing should be banned on the same grounds – in addition to the fact that such tests provide no protection for the consumer.

Meanwhile, please purchase only from the most ethical companies - and write to companies without a fixed-cut-off date, asking them to go cruelty-free.

References

1. GA Nixon et al, *Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology*, 1975 Vol 31 p481-490
2. D Swanston, in *Animals and Alternatives in Toxicity Testing*, Eds. Balls et al, Academic Press 1983
3. KA Stitzel, in *Progress in reduction, refinement and replacement of animals experimentation*, Eds. Balls et al, Elsevier 2000 p587-600
4. E. Palmer, *Chemistry in Britain*, May 2000, p32-34
5. *Ibid*