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## Do Aveda products live up to their reputation for purity?

by [Annie Baxter](#), Minnesota Public Radio  
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**Minneapolis-based Aveda is heading into its 30th year. And the company does so as the leader of the North American market for natural and organic beauty products. Aveda says the company has only grown more committed to its "natural" roots in the 10 years since cosmetics giant Estee Lauder bought it. But some critics think Aveda is falling short of its reputation.**

St. Paul, Minn. — If you have ever used Aveda products, you know the telltale signs -- the aromas can seem at once minty and sweet; product names touting rosemary, flaxseed and aloe make it sound as though the ingredients were plucked right from the garden.

Those garden aromas practically pour off Rachel Huss, who just got her hair done at the Aveda Institute in Minneapolis. She is a big fan of the products, and Aveda's founder, Horst Rechelbacher. His plant-based approach to beauty products has indelibly stamped the company.

"I definitely love what the founder -- what he believes in terms of organic usage, and their mission statement to help the environment and other cultures around the world," Huss says.

Ten years after Rechelbacher sold Aveda to Estee Lauder, the company continues to trumpet an eco-friendly message. Last year, it became the first beauty company to manufacture using 100 percent wind energy. Spokeswoman Suzanne Dawson says Aveda is seeking organic certification for more of its ingredients.

"Now, 90 percent of all the essential oils we use in our company are certified organic, and 89 percent of raw herbal ingredients as well are certified organic," Dawson says.

**"A company like Aveda, with the backing of billion-dollar Estee Lauder, really ought to be at the front of the line innovating the safest products on the market."**

- Stacy Malkan, the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics

But that does not mean all Aveda ingredients are natural. And that is distressing to Kay Wasylyszyn of St. Paul.

"We won a basket of Aveda products at a charity event, and we were really excited until we looked online and saw what was in the products, and we didn't end up using them."

Wasylyszyn is pregnant. With a child on the way, she and her husband are especially vigilant about the products they use. When they found a Web site that showed some of the potentially toxic ingredients in Aveda's and other companies' products, they were concerned.

The Web site is called Skin Deep. It's run by the watchdog groups the Environmental Working Group and the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics.

The Web site uses information from government and other research, and then rates the toxicity of personal care products on a scale of 1-10. A number of Aveda products have a low ranking of 2, but others go up to 7 on the scale.

Stacy Malkan with the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics says those higher toxicity rankings on Aveda products derive from ingredients the Skin Deep Web site says can irritate the skin, harm the reproductive system, or disrupt hormones.

Malkan thinks the company should do better.

"A company like Aveda, with the backing of billion-dollar Estee Lauder, really ought to be at the front of the line innovating the safest products on the market," says Malkan. "Instead, I think what we've seen is a trend that the major multinational beauty companies face a lot of pressure to keep costs low, and use a lot of cheap synthetic petrochemical ingredients."

But the Skin Deep Web site leaves some gaps -- it does not indicate what dose levels are harmful. And Aveda says the database sometimes draws on formulas no longer in use.

As it turns out, the company has been phasing out an ingredient associated with hormone

disruption, parabens, even though the Food and Drug Administration says parabens are safe. Aveda's Suzanne Dawson says about half the company's products no longer contain them.

"So we have about 350 products that are out there now that are preserved without parabens, and we have a very active plan in place to replace the remainder," Dawson says.

Aveda also faces criticism from the other end of the spectrum, from people who care less about product purity than performance.

Denny Kemp salon in Minneapolis used to sell only Aveda products, but now it offers two other product lines that do not claim to be all-natural. Stylist Manuel Villarreal trained at Aveda and has been using the company's products for more than a decade. He loves Aveda, but sometimes, he wants to use products that will style or hold better.

"Suddenly you realize [that if] you put in a little bit of chemicals, it works better. You have to go, I guess, to the dark side in order for it to work," Villarreal says.

Nevertheless, there is money to be made for Aveda pushing its natural agenda. By some estimates, the natural and organic personal product market is likely to grow by half over the next two years.

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