

# north florida face painting guild

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## **COSMETICS AND CHEMISTRY; OR WHAT DO THOSE WARNING LABELS MEAN? NEON FACE PAINT**

Tallahassee FL. March, 2011— Recently there has an increased awareness in cosmetic labeling especially as it is applied to products face painters use. To get right to the source the North Florida Face Painting Guild talked, at length, with a doctor of chemistry from a Florida university. We are providing his comments in full since we'd like everyone, professional face painters to concerned parents to have a better understanding of the FDA labeling as applied to cosmetics....

It seems an annual event that the makeup we use gets a good bashing -- just before end-of-the-school-year festivities or more commonly right before Halloween when parents find themselves standing in front of 'face paint' at their local mega mart. Last year there were very dubious 'tests' that claimed to find lead in face paint. What they omitted was that the level of lead was lower than is permitted in drinking water, and that similar or higher levels of lead are \*everywhere\* including the soil. Despite the problems with their claim, it made a great media sound bite and it was picked up by various media outlets

Now we're dealing with issues around "neon" color additives and formaldehyde. While formaldehyde as a word sounds scary because its polysyllabic and technical, it might surprise you to know formaldehyde is also \*everywhere\*. It's typically 0.03 ppm in indoor air and comes from sources as diverse as your carpet, your cabinets, your cigarette and your cooking. Perhaps even more surprising is that formaldehyde is an endogenous human metabolite, which means it's constantly present in your body -- at about 3 mg/L in blood -- as the result of your body's natural biochemical operation. Because your

body is constantly producing formaldehyde it also has built-in mechanisms for rapidly detoxifying and eliminating it.

***So formaldehyde is common, its in my body right now AND my body knows how to get rid of its because its been doing it all my life...hmmm, interesting.***

**So what about the levels of formaldehyde in neon face paint. Does it cause skin irritation?**

Individuals typically begin to experience eye and mucous membrane irritation at around 0.1 ppm in air, and medical testing for sensitivity to formaldehyde contact dermatitis is done using a 2% solution of formaldehyde in water. (For those of you unaware, the signs of heavy dose formaldehyde contact dermatitis are white patches, peeling, cracking, scaling and inflammation.) So what does this mean? It means if you're *\*not\** having white patches of scaly skin falling off and you're *\*not\** experiencing acute eye or nose irritation you're very likely using a product with LESS than 2% formaldehyde, and that product is producing less than 0.1 ppm of formaldehyde in the air near the people you've painted. Think about it -- if these kinds of reactions were happening in the people we paint with neon colors, we'd darn sure hear about them! If there really were "more formaldehyde than that used in nail hardener (5%)" you bet we'd be hearing of dozens and dozens of cases!

Instead of hearing of dozens of cases, we don't seem to be hearing much, if anything from anyone regarding a reaction to these products. I'm going to bet that many, if not most, of us have used them on ourselves -- probably often. Our experience with these paints is valid and realistic, and is quite likely a more valuable source of information about their safety than the lack of FDA approval, which -- by the way -- *\* is because they haven't been tested, not because the FDA has positive evidence of harm.\**

**So what about the whole "causes cancer" idea? Does formaldehyde build up in your system? Does it soak through your skin?**

Formaldehyde is classified as a probable human carcinogen by the EPA, *\*but only for individuals with extremely high peak and average industrial and occupational exposures\** (for example anatomists and embalmers). The link to cancer at lower exposure levels in humans is very weak, possibly non-existent. The rodent work implicating cancer was done at very high exposure levels. For example, no cancer-related effect was observed in rats until the formaldehyde level reached 2-3 ppm in air -- a level that would send all of us running from the room rubbing our eyes and clutching our throats. However, some people tolerate routine exposure to those levels as part of their job, and it is those people who are at risk.

Since formaldehyde is an endogenous metabolite there is good reason to think the human body can likely detoxify and excrete low levels resulting from infrequent exposure without significantly enhanced risk of cancer or other diseases. For example, it is proven impossible to raise the blood level of formaldehyde in people continuously exposed to 0.5 ppm in air -- your body gets rid of it too fast for it to build up. It is known that the half-life of formaldehyde in your body is under 1 minute -- that is to say,

over 95% of the formaldehyde you are exposed to is detoxified by your body's natural defenses in less than 5 minutes, and virtually all of it is gone in less than 10 minutes.

This means that painting someone on an infrequent basis is likely without significant risk. Face/body painters who use it on themselves regularly might be at somewhat elevated risk, but given the apparent levels in the paint – which we are left to guess at -- the risk is likely small.

I acknowledge incomplete testing on this product but I am not going to react out of fear of some unlikely unknown. Nor am I alone in questioning the sudden panic around these products...

Marcella M: I have been using neon colors for over 33 years with nothing but great results. Kryolan has been selling them to the make up world for 75 years without a problem. Personally I will continue to use them for as long as they are available.

**Michelle H:** formaldehyde is only potentially harmful/carcinogenic if inhaled. There was concern about \*Potential skin allergies that prompted the "Formaldehyde Free" claim. You can't do much with the HAZMAT info (it's is only insightful if you spill a jug of pure formaldehyde on yourself or sit in a gas chamber etc.).

Shannon R: I am a cancer survivor & don't like to expose myself to many known carcinogens. ...the cosmetics info link actually makes it sound not too bad... as it mentions that formaldehyde is in the air we breathe and really only effects people who breathe it in mass quantities (like in a factory)..

Daniel L: The question you need to ask yourself is, before you knew all this info, have you had a negative reaction to any of the paints you use since you started? If the answer is yes, stop using those products. If the answer is NO, then use your common sense judgment and make a conscious decision on whether or not to still use your products ... I can tell you out of the 10 years I have been painting, I have not had one person complain then or now! I will continue to use a product until it is pulled completely by the FDA.

Karen Mercer, founding artist of **FairyDust Faces** and co-director of the **North Florida Face Painting Guild** is extensively committed to the success of art instruction in public schools and in local youth organizations. The **North Florida Face Painting Guild** is committed to the safety; quality and professionalism of face and body art in northern Florida.

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