



national asian pacific american women's forum
napawf

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November 15, 2007

Re: November 15, 2007 Hearing on the Use of Nail Salon Products in the Workplace

Dear Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee,

The undersigned health, environmental, worker and women's advocacy organizations applaud the Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee for addressing the health and safety of nail salon workers. As the number of nail salon workers increases to more than 380,000 nationwide, there is a pressing need for policymakers to protect the health of some of our nation's most vulnerable workers. Women, mostly women of color of reproductive age, comprise 96% of the nail industry's workforce. Asian and Pacific Islander (API) women dominate the nail salon industry as both owners and workers. California, specifically, is home to 21% of the entire national population of nail salon workers, where an estimated 80% of the workforce is comprised of Vietnamese immigrant women. The nail salon industry represents an accessible entry point into the workforce for many immigrant women and an immediate way to earn money for their families.

However, this accessibility comes at heavy cost. Nail salon workers are routinely exposed to a variety of toxic chemicals with the potential for a variety of negative health impacts. On a daily basis and often for long hours at a time, nail salon workers handle toxic solvents, chemical solutions, glues, cosmetic products and other substances containing chemicals, some known to be carcinogenic and others suspected to cause reproductive harm or other adverse health impacts. These chemicals may be inhaled or absorbed through the skin, some accumulating in the body over time. Childbearing women may

also pass these toxins to fetuses or to newborns when breastfeeding. As health and worker safety advocates, we are also particularly concerned about the lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate public education materials on the safe handling of toxic chemicals available to this largely immigrant worker population.

Because there is very limited governmental regulation or review of the chemicals used in cosmetic and nail care products, those who earn a living working in nail salons are particularly vulnerable to toxic chemical exposure. The U.S. Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has no authority to require that cosmetic products be tested for safety before they go on the market, and also lacks the ability to require recalls of products found to be harmful. Based on growing concerns around the health of nail salon workers, many advocates, workers, scientists, and agencies are now working together to advance greater health and safety in nail salons and to demand that cosmetics manufactures produce and market safer products.

Given their occupational exposures, history of immigration, lack of awareness about health risks, and limited access to health care, nail salon workers present a particularly acute need that must be addressed. With the passage of the California Safe Cosmetics Act of 2005, California has already served as a national role model for passing legislation that requires manufacturers to disclose ingredients that are known by the state to cause cancer or birth defects. It is our sincere hope that the California Senate Labor and Industrial Relations Committee will continue to lead the rest of the country by passing legislation that adequately addresses the health and safety needs of nail salon workers as well as the general public. Please contact Dawn Philip at (202) 293-2688 to let us know how we can further support the Committee's efforts on this issue.

Sincerely,

Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Breast Cancer Action
Breast Cancer Fund
Center for Environmental Health, California
Coalition for Clean Air
Community Coalition for Environmental Justice
Hmong National Development
NARAL Pro-Choice California
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
New Voices Pittsburgh: Women of Color for Reproductive Justice
Pioneer Valley Project – Healthy Nail Salon Project
Surviving Breast Cancer
The Annie Appleseed Project
The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
Women's Voices For the Earth