

(Earth Talk) Are there any efforts underway to green up the hair care industry?

Written by EarthTalk® From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine
Tuesday, 20 October 2009 15:29

Dear EarthTalk: As I understand it, hair salons are pretty toxic enterprises on many counts. Are there any efforts underway to green up that industry? -- Paula Howe, San Francisco, CA

Hair salons have long been criticized for the pollution they generate. Traditional hair dyes and many shampoos contain harmful synthetic chemicals that are routinely used on customers' scalps—and then washed down the drain where they can accumulate in waterways, soils and even our bloodstreams.

While there doesn't appear to be an industry-wide, coordinated effort to green up these operations, green-friendly salons are popping up all across the country, leading the charge by taking matters into their own hands. A simple Google search for "green hair salons" followed by your two-letter state abbreviation may well turn up one or several within driving distance.

Not surprisingly, Southern California seems to be ground zero for the green hair salon movement. For example, Beverly Hills' Shades Hair Studio prides itself on its chemical-free atmosphere. Spurred on by her own health problems related to working with conventional hair dyes, owner Susan Henry—so-called "colorist to the stars"—first created her own line of natural hair colors that contain no harmful ammonia, and then transformed her Shades salon into a model for environmentally friendly hair care.

Across town, Nori's EcoSalon in Encino is making waves in the industry for its non-toxic permanent hair color treatments and 100 percent botanical henna using home-grown formulations. To boot, Nori's interior features energy efficient lighting, recycled denim insulation, low-VOC paints on the walls and sustainably sourced bamboo on the floors, along with a number of other green touches to keep indoor air quality high. And up the coast, San Francisco's Descend Salon goes to similar lengths, and then steps it up a notch by recycling its hair clippings for use in absorbent mats used in oil spill clean-up efforts.

Not just for California anymore, eco-friendly hair salons occupy just about every major North American city, many operating in the same spirit as Shades, Nori's and Descend in making use of non-toxic and/or organic ingredients while greening indoor surroundings for an overall healthy experience. Then there's the granddaddy of them all, Aveda, which in addition to operating some 200 of its own spas, supplies natural hair care and personal care products to 7,000 professional hair salons and spas in 29 countries.

Another way to get a greener hair treatment is to search on the websites of green hair care product makers such as EcoColors, Aveda, Modern Organic Products or Innersense for salons that use their products.

Of course, if none of the salons in your area have gone green, take it upon yourself to encourage them to make the transition. You can start by showing them this article and suggesting they begin to carry some all-natural products, perhaps by first contacting companies like EcoColors, Aveda, Modern Organic Products or Innersense to see what's out there that they could easily transition to.

CONTACTS: Shades, www.shadesnaturalcolor.com; Nori's EcoSalon, www.norisecosalon.com;

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Descend salon, www.descendalon.com; EcoColors, www.ecocolors.net; Aveda, www.aveda.com; Modern Organic Products, Innersense, www.innersensebeauty.com.

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