In the spotlight: The fight over preservatives in personal care products

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Rising public concern over the safety of synthetic preservatives in personal care products, such as sunscreens, is pressuring stores and manufacturers to turn to naturally derived alternatives. But an article in *Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN)*, the weekly news magazine of the American Chemical Society, notes that a recent recall of a naturally preserved product that nonetheless became contaminated with microbes shows the issue of synthetic versus natural is not cut-and-dried.

Marc S. Reisch, a C&EN senior correspondent, explains that preservatives, regardless of where they come from, keep potentially harmful microbes from growing in bottled products. Preservatives are low-cost, low-concentration additives that give these products their long shelf life. But research within the past decade suggests that common synthetic preservatives, such as parabens and formaldehyde, carry their own health risks. Defenders of these compounds counter that the concentrations of the preservatives are so low that they pose little, if any, danger. But some environmental health experts and consumers aren't buying that argument. In response, some manufacturers are turning to alternatives, including naturally derived compounds.

However, last year, a maker of natural personal care products found that some tubes of its children's sunscreen lotion were contaminated with potentially troublesome microbes, despite containing a plant-based preservative, the article notes. The company, W.S. Badger Co., voluntarily recalled the affected lots of the lotions (SPF 30 Baby Sunscreen and SPF 30 Kids Sunscreen). The incident highlights the fact

that manufacturers need to practice caution, whether preservatives are natural or synthetic.

More information: "Widening War Over Preservatives" cen.acs.org/articles/92/i23/Cl … tives-Continues.html

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