

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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Making sure safety product is safe

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER EDITORIAL BOARD

On sunny days, parents are likely to remind kids to wear sunscreen. That's certainly a good idea but cautious parents may want to check what is in the sunscreen.

As several public interest groups recently documented, the ingredients in cosmetics, shampoos and other personal care products, including sunscreens, aren't generally tested for safety. The groups' report said a third of some 7,500 products listed at least one ingredient the federal government believes may cause cancer.

An industry committee tests some ingredients but the Food and Drug Administration lets products go to market without requiring any safety data. One of the public interest organizations, the Environmental Working Group, suggests most people assume the products have been approved by some government agency.

Especially in the case of items marketed as having health benefits, closer scrutiny should be required in advance. But unless the law or FDA practices change, consumers will remain essentially on their own.

In the case of sunscreens, the report found that 6 percent of the products listed ingredients, usually alpha and beta hydroxy acids, which might cause cancer. Sunscreens remain a highly recommended way to cut the risks of skin cancers. The sun's role in causing skin cancer is well documented, while trouble from ingredients in personal care products is unproven. But as long as we have weak regulation of personal care products, a dose of consumer caution is also in order.