

The California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative

The **California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative** was formed in 2005 out of growing concern for the health and safety of nail salon and other cosmetology workers, owners, and consumers. The Collaborative coordinates, leverages, and builds upon the respective expertise and activities of its diverse members and partners to advance a preventative environmental health agenda for the nail salon sector in California. Composed of public health and environmental advocates, nail salon workers and owners, community-based groups, educational institutions, and allies in government agencies, the Collaborative seeks to proactively address health and safety concerns facing the nail salon worker community through an integrated approach using policy advocacy, research, outreach, and education strategies.

Background:

In the United States, the beauty industry is booming in response to increasing consumer demand for skin, nail, hair and other personal care services. “Mani/Pedis” are all the rage as customers want to be pampered with the latest nail designs, colors, and styles. Cosmetology is the fastest growing profession in California. Over the last two decades, nail salon services alone have more than tripled. Currently, there are over 114,000 manicurists in California, the majority of who are women of color (3-4 out of every 5 workers are estimated to be Vietnamese immigrants), and more than half are of reproductive age. Many of these women speak limited English, do not have access to health care coverage, and lack understanding of the U.S. legal and health care systems. Nail salon workers tend to earn less than \$18,200 a year and work in conditions that can be hazardous to their health. On a daily basis and often for long hours at a stretch, nail salon technicians handle solvents, glues, and other nail care products, containing a multitude of chemicals known or suspected to cause cancer, respiratory or reproductive harm. There is very limited regulation and review of the chemicals used in cosmetic and personal care products. Of the more than 10,000 chemicals used in personal care and nail products 89 percent have not been tested independently for their safety or impacts on human health before entering the marketplace. Given their occupational exposures, history of immigration, low awareness of health risks, and limited access to health care, the nail salon workers have complex health profiles that places them at risk for occupational-related health impacts. While acute impacts, such as rashes and respiratory ailments have been well-documented, little research has been conducted to date on the long-term chronic health impacts of toxic occupational exposures on salon workers. Additionally, there remains a paucity of culturally and linguistically appropriate educational and outreach materials intended to build awareness about environmental exposures and to help workers and owners implement safety precautions and use least-toxic salon products.

In recent years, the nail salon community's working conditions and exposure to chemicals has received greater attention by the public and environmental health fields, and the scientific, advocacy and Asian American communities. There are a growing number of coordinated efforts across California and the U.S. designed to advocate for better protection of workers and to build increased awareness about the multifaceted health, safety, and labor issues facing the sector. While there has been increasing environmental health advocacy in California, statewide legislative efforts to ban specific chemicals from cosmetic and personal products in recent years have been thwarted. However, in 2005 a significant victory was achieved with the passage of the **California Safe Cosmetics Act**, which requires cosmetics manufacturers to disclose to the California Department of Public Health (DPH) if their products contain chemicals known to cause cancer or birth defects, and authorizes the DPH to investigate the health impacts of such chemicals found in cosmetics. The adoption of this Act bolsters further advocacy, organizing, and outreach towards the development of a healthy nail salon sector in California. The Collaborative is committed to assuring the effective implementation of the Act and to advancing other strategies to improve conditions for the nail salon community and other cosmetology workers.

Mission Statement:

The California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative’s mission is to advance a preventive environmental health agenda to assure the health and safety of the nail and beauty salon communities.

Collaborative Activities:

The Collaborative meets quarterly as an entire group and convenes its three subcommittees (policy advocacy, outreach/education, and research) regularly to share information, develop common strategies and engage in coordinated activities to support its mission, including:

- Directly engaging nail salon workers, and when possible, owners in identifying issues of concern and developing solutions to benefit the nail salon workforce and small businesses;
- Providing culturally-relevant information, advocating for safer products and practices, and promoting increased awareness of environmental health concerns facing the salon community;
- Developing best practices for outreach and education to the nail salon community;
- Identifying gaps in scientific research and developing proposals for addressing these gaps;
- Working to reduce and/or eliminate the use of, and resulting exposure, to toxins in nail salons;
- Organizing environmental health outreach forums for the nail salon community;
- Increasing public awareness about environmental health concerns facing nail salon workers and about toxins found in nail, beauty and personal care products;
- Outreaching to and partnering with other cosmetology and beauty care sectors (including African American hair salons, Latino salons and other beauty care worker populations);
- Coordinating informational briefings on nail salon worker health and safety issues for elected officials and the California legislature;
- Ensuring the enforcement of existing policies and regulations related to the health and safety of the nail salon community (including implementation of the Safe Cosmetics Act);
- As necessary, advocating for the creation of new protective laws, policies and regulations; and
- Providing leadership to state and national efforts working to advance a healthy nail salon agenda, comprehensive chemical policy reform, and other environmental health initiatives.

Collaborative Structure & Current Members:

The Collaborative is a multi-organization and multi-stakeholder effort, which is fiscally-sponsored and managed by Asian Health Services, an Oakland-based non-profit community clinic. The Collaborative's steering committee meets regularly to establish policies and guide the effort's overall work. Decision-making occurs by group consensus. Foundation partners provide financial support for the Collaborative's activities and coordination. Current members include representation from:

- Alameda County Public Health Nursing
- Asian Advocacy Project of Community Action Marin
- Asian Americans for Civil Rights & Equality
- Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice
- Asian Health Services
- Asian Law Caucus
- Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
- Asian Pacific American Legal Center
- Bay Area Nail Salon Owners & Workers
- Breast Cancer Action
- Breast Cancer Fund
- CA Department of Public Health, HESIS
- Center for Environmental Health
- Environmental Finance Center, Region 9
- National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, CA Chapter
- Northern California Cancer Center
- Orange County Asian Pacific Islander Community Alliance
- Planned Parenthood Golden Gate
- Physicians for Social Responsibility, L.A.
- United Food & Commercial Workers Local 5
- United Hair & Nail Association
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9
- Women's Voices of the Earth
- Worksafe

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