



COSMÉBIO POSITION PAPER

Allergens in fragrance and essential oils

Introduction

Cosmébio is the first association in the world dedicated to natural and organic cosmetics. In 2020, the association reinforced its commitments by publishing the new Cosmébio Manifesto. The first commitment listed in this Manifesto is a reminder that the association, as well as all its members, “are to be guarantors of safe and effective cosmetics”. It’s in this sense that we wish to remind the public about the benefits of essential oils and contest certain rating application’s methods of disfavoring natural cosmetics containing listed allergens.

Allergens in cosmetics

An allergy is an abnormal or excessive reaction by the body’s immune system to a substance in the environment (allergen) that is typically harmless. An allergy is a specific response, unique to the individual troubled by this type of immune response. Although it can be severe, an allergy remains a rare phenomenon throughout the population. Accordingly, people predisposed to allergic reactions should exercise vigilance in order to avoid being in contact (depending on their level of reaction) with the allergen.

For cosmetics, the European regulations have a list of 23 allergens (limonene, cinalol, geraniol, etc.) whose presence must be mentioned by the brand on their packaging when the quantity reaches a certain threshold. The limits are set at 100 ppm for rinse-off products and 10 ppm for leave-on products.

In natural cosmetics, these allergens are not added voluntarily. They are naturally present in natural ingredients. These allergens are often a part of the multitude of molecules that form essential oils.

As a guarantor for transparency in cosmetics, Cosmébïo supports the need to declare the presence of allergens on cosmetic packaging (EC No. 1223/2009). As with cosmetics, food allergies are also indicated (shellfish, eggs, dairy...).

Cosmébïo is committed to safe and effective cosmetics

For Cosmébïo, a cosmetic containing allergens of natural origin should not be discriminated by rating apps. Due to the presence of listed allergens, cosmetics containing essential oils often receive an unfavorable rating from barcode scanning applications. Cosmébïo would like to call attention to the importance of essential oils in that they guarantee the sensorial aspect of natural cosmetics and are a beneficial active ingredient for the consumer.

Consequently, the Cosmébïo association prefers to promote the function of essential oils in cosmetics. Essential oils are natural ingredients that augment the value of a cosmetic, far beyond their use as a fragrance. Essential oils also provide calming, soothing or toning effects and are also considered antimicrobial, anti-acne, etc... All the molecules, including those considered allergenic, extracted by distillation are part of the plant's totum (all the constituents of the plant) and are an integral component of essential oils. For millennia, men have been confronted with these molecules naturally occurring in the environment.

Allergic risk - the difference between food and cosmetics

Milk is not criticized by rating applications, so why is an organic lotion scented with essential oils? Especially because the allergenic aspect of a cosmetic remains linked to the user. Two different people exposed to the same substance will not necessarily react in the same way. And the risks linked to fragrance allergens, such as skin irritations, concern only those sensitive to these substances.

A person allergic to one of these molecules can undoubtedly experience discomfort if they are exposed. For this, Cosmébïo reiterates the importance of transparent and legible warnings on the product's packaging. But this fact does not present a risk for the general public. The risk of an allergic reaction is quite limited and the mentioning of these ingredients in the INCI list should be seen as more informative rather than a sanitary measure. The aim is to facilitate their detection by those needing to avoid allergens. Moreover, the European Scientific Committee for Consumer Safety (CSCS) has published a fact sheet explaining that only 1 to 3% of the European population declared an allergy linked to fragrance.

One should note that when peeling a mandarin or an orange, the exposure to limonene is 1000 times superior to that of a cosmetic containing this molecule. And yet, peeling an orange presents no risk for non-allergic people.

We can therefore assert that allergens stemming from fragrance are to cosmetics as to what shellfish is to food. They are mentioned on the packaging to protect those who must avoid them,

but they pose no risk to others. In food, the presence of allergens does not affect the overall rating of the product given by "rating" applications. So why is this not the same case for cosmetics?

Conclusion

We therefore propose that rating applications continue to identify allergens when contained in a cosmetic product in order to alert those concerned. However, we demand that the presence of allergens no longer contribute to the rating of a cosmetic product, giving health and beauty products an equal footing as to that of food. Allowing natural cosmetics to disassociate from this unfavorable rating system.

It's important to note that certified organic cosmetics are certainly the most accurate representation of sustainable cosmetics by promoting the use of renewable resources and contributing to the development of organic farming.

The transparency that apps bring to the consumer is indeed coherent with our association's objectives. However, it seems absurd to us to disfavor a source of natural fragrance seeing as the use of natural ingredients is the motor behind the development of the organic cosmetics industry. These natural ingredients are what makes it possible to offer the consumer the best product for their health as well as for the environment.

