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Beep! Beep! Beep! The incessant buzz of the alarm clock finally rouses the woman, who drowsily switches the OFF button. After a quick shower to start her day, she wraps her hair with a towel and gets dressed. When she finishes applying lotion to her face, she removes the towel and adds a bit of mousse to her moist hair. Finally, just before heading out the bathroom, she carefully applies her blush and mascara.

What is wrong with this picture? After all, this woman did nothing more than what millions of women across the nation do every morning. However, neither she nor many other Americans realize that the aforementioned cosmetics are contaminated with chemicals associated with breast cancer. Because a number of these products are items that many regularly use, I made the most of **Silent Spring**'s resources to expand my knowledge on this topic's surprising controversies. By understanding the many potential dangers of cosmetics, I hope to spread awareness in the wider community, continue my research in this divisive subject, and above all, make healthier everyday choices.

During my two-week experience, I learned a great deal about the hidden toxins in some of the most mundane products. For example, many shampoos have been discovered to contain parabens, chemical preservatives that mimic naturally occurring estrogen and are linked to breast cancer. Meanwhile, phthalates, toxins commonly found in nail polish, are known to cause a range of reproductive problems and birth defects in lab animals. Such a widespread problem is additionally compounded by both the government's failure to prohibit such chemicals and the cosmetics companies' abilities to exploit the lax health regulations. A number of industries often vaguely label suspicious chemicals as "fragrance" or neglect to disclose them at all.

Under the guidance of Dr. Brody—the director of the **Silent Spring Institute** and Janet Ackerman—my mentor, I explored the Internet's websites concerning this subject to understand the multifarious resources advocating community awareness. Unfortunately, the Internet itself is as contradicting as it is informative. One aspect of the project involved comparing the toxicity rating systems of two websites, Skin Deep and Good Guide, both of which analyzed the hazard levels of different cosmetics and worked to help Americans pick healthier alternatives. After converting the Skin Deep scale to match that of Good Guide, we interns discovered only a moderate correlation between the ratings. Such findings demonstrate that even experts disagree about what constitutes "safe" or "toxic."

Given all these obstacles, one may wonder, is a future of safer cosmetics even realistic? The answer is yes. Already, many countries around the world, lead by those of the European Union, have taken steps to remedy this problem. With the European Union's banning over 1100 chemicals, there is little doubt that the United States can do the same. What's more, this cause is not only for the lawmakers, but also for consumers to stay involved. Whether consumers are calling their favorite cosmetics companies to request safer products or simply being more wary of label claims, every contribution truly makes a difference. Thus, by giving the cosmetics companies the makeovers that they desperately need, we can prevent countless Americans from undergoing the years of grief and suffering associated with breast cancer.

“Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.” ~Winston Churchill

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