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## **Plain Janes are eco-heroines**

*By L. Kelly*

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Call it a righteous victory for all the women out there who don't primp and preen, and for the guys who believe that a five-minute shower is all they need to face the world.

Turns out, we're on the front lines of environmental defense.

An analysis released last Wednesday by a team of scientists for the U.S. Geological Survey shows that a variety of chemicals from personal-care products — shampoo, makeup, deodorant and such — are among the 95 "organic wastewater contaminants" found in U.S. waterways.

Sure, we no-makeup types just thought we were saving time and money by not spending an hour every morning in front of the mirror with an array of foundations, concealers, highlighters, minimizers, moisturizers, powder palettes and other weapons of facial warfare.

We comb-and-go folks thought we were just simplifying our lives when we adopted "basic" haircuts that don't require the application of "product" — gels, shines, waxes, sculpting sprays, volumizers, mousses, thickening glues, glazes, activators or texture creams — before we can leave the house.

We accepted that others would often judge us to be lazy, ill-groomed, unaware of our beauty potential or "letting ourselves go."

Most of us never dreamed we were on the cutting edge of an "emerging" environmental issue.

You see, all those beauty products eventually get scrubbed off faces and washed out of hair — and into water-treatment systems that aren't designed to remove them. So the chemicals that millions of Americans put on their bodies end up in our water.

Although most of us think of solvents and other industrial wastes when we think of water pollution, the Geological Survey looked for chemicals found in PPCPs, which stands for "pharmaceuticals and personal care products."

It's becoming clear, from the new analysis published in the current issue of "Environmental Science Technology" and from previous studies done in Europe and Canada, that chemicals used in beauty aids are a growing concern.

Generally, we're talking about trace amounts, not rivers flowing with shower gel and mascara, but scientists are uneasy because the effects of long-term exposure and how such chemicals may interact in the wild are unclear.

While they try to sort it all out and develop better ways to remove PPCP contaminants, it would be prudent to reduce the flow. Sure, the folks who will give up their hair gel only when it's pried from their cold, dead hands vastly outnumber the shampoo-only community, but perhaps we all could use a bit less.

A headful of thick, foamy shampoo may feel luxurious, but it's just wasteful, say beauty-care experts. When you use too much shampoo, you're sending more detergents, fragrance, preservatives, humectants, thickeners, emulsifiers and conditioners down the drain needlessly.

It's also worth noting that frequent shampooing can make hair dry and unruly, which prompts many folks to turn to other products — and a whole additional slate of chemicals — to solve the problem. It's better to just wash your hair a little less often; you'll create less pollution and spend less time and money on your hair, too.

The same is true of bathing and showering; there is such a thing as being too clean. Not only does the resulting dry, itchy, flaky skin prompt us to reach for moisturizers and lotions, it can make us more susceptible to irritations and infections.

By definition, PPCPs include common medications, too, such as antibiotics, hormone replacements, antidepressants and analgesics. To be honest, it's easier to focus on beauty products than treatments that measurably improve our quality of life.

Everyone can live without wrinkle cream and hair spray, though.

Can't you?

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