

COUNCILS STEP UP PRESSURE ON HAIR STRAIGHTENERS

A London council has started contacting salons to find out what chemical hair-straightening products they are using, as part of the first stage of an investigation that could lead to the eventual prosecution of salons using products containing illegal levels of formaldehyde.

Hammersmith & Fulham council confirmed to *SalonFocus* that it had contacted all 90 salons in its borough as part of what it termed "phase one" of an investigation into illegal chemical hair straighteners.

Phase two will be to chase up any of those who have failed to respond, with phase three being enforcement and – potentially – prosecution.

However, the council has stressed this eventuality, even if it were to happen, would be an option of last resort.

A council spokeswoman emphasised "a lot" of salons had responded well before the mid-June deadline it had originally set.

"Between trading standards and environmental health we are looking through the responses and we will go from there and visit particular salons as and when we might need to," she said.

"We don't want to prosecute in the first instance – we want to work with hairdressers and find out what's going on.

"We are not out to get people. It is just making sure people are safe but where enforcement is needed we would prosecute," she added.

The council is a member of the **North West London Safety Group**, which earlier this year said it would be mounting an investigation from April into salons that used products that contained or released more than 0.2 per cent formaldehyde, the legal European limit (*SalonFocus*, March/April 2011).

It is not the only council beginning to ratchet up the pressure on salons over this issue.

Haringey Council, another member group, said it had begun writing to salons and shops it believed might be selling and using chemical hair straighteners to make them aware of the risks to health some products can cause.

The council's trading standards and environmental health teams are worried some Brazilian hair-straightening products being used and sold in local hair salons and shops may contain illegally high levels of formaldehyde.

"We're also asking salons and shops to tell us via pre-paid questionnaire which Brazilian straightening products they're actually using or selling so that we have proper information about what brands are on sale in the borough and where the suppliers are," said a spokesman.

The council would not shy away from considering "more formal" enforcement action, he added.

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