

SALONS WARNED TO POLICE CHEMICAL STRAIGHTENERS THEMSELVES

Exclusive by
Andrew Don

Steep cuts in local authority budgets over the next few years mean salons owners will not be able to rely on enforcement bodies to police the safety and legality of chemical hair-straightening products they are using on clients, an investigation by *SalonFocus* has concluded.

A combination of buck-passing and spending reviews by local authorities in the wake of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review in October has left salon owners potentially in much greater danger of being sued by staff whose health might be put at risk because they have inadvertently used products that breach European Commission statutory limits for formaldehyde. Customers could also sue if affected.

Benjamin Shipman, brand director at **Kebelo Systems**, which planned to launch its own "hair-smoothing" system this month, told *SalonFocus* he had contacted several trading standards departments about a study his company commissioned from **Intertek**, the global group of testing laboratories, about formaldehyde levels in some products.

"They have either passed the buck on to another office or just simply said they don't have the manpower. One mentioned cutbacks," he said.

And **Mark Holmes**, managing director, of **TCQ Nanoscientific**, complained his local

office, **Hampshire Trading Standards**, was not doing enough to monitor or investigate products that could be in breach.

"I feel sorry for the people that will be affected by these products, now and in the future, who are not being afforded the protection they deserve and should expect," he warned.

Christine Heemskerk, the **Trading Standard Institute's** lead officer for

product safety, admitted chemical hair-straightening treatments that had been subject to **Rapex** (Rapid Alert System for Non-Food Products) alerts from the **European Union's Department of Consumer Affairs** because of formaldehyde content above the 0.02 per cent legal limit were still being offered to salon clients in the UK because local authorities did not have the resources to follow them up.

"Rapex alerts go to all authorities. We can't insist they act on this. We are not the government and obviously with the current cutbacks it is going to be even worse. Each individual authority makes their own minds up how they allocate the resources they have," she said.

Another issue for salons appears to be a worrying lack of clarity over the lines of responsibility when it comes to telling business owners they need to act to remove products from shelves.

Julie Barratt, director of the **Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Wales**, stressed it was the responsibility of salon owners, under the *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974*, to take any products known to be subject to an alert off their shelves.

"It's not the job of environmental health," she said, adding environmental health officers normally looked to the **Health and Safety Executive** to notify local authorities when it was necessary to put out a warning to salons.

But HSE spokesman **Jason Green** insisted this was a local authority issue regulated by the **Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)**.

Cosmetic Toiletry & Perfumery Association director-general **Christopher Flower** has written to the **BIS** calling for an investigation into illegal chemical hair-straightening products, demanding "urgent enforcement action, primarily for reasons of public health but also to protect the reputation of responsible companies".

Eileen Lawson, **NHF** secretary general, said: "As we clearly cannot rely on local enforcement agencies to police these products we have to be on our guard



MARCIA TEIXEIRA. NEW PRODUCTS FOR EU

when we consider using any of them as the buck will stop with the salon if anything goes wrong."

NHF president **Mark Coray** agreed, stressing that salon owners were desperate for some clarity. "Forget the policing cost. Let's just get the information out... knowledge is all important," he said.

In response, **Councillor Ken Thornber**, leader of **Hampshire County Council**, strongly denied the county's trading standards department was being forced to cut corners because of cost-cutting.

"The suggestion that **Hampshire County Council Trading Standards** took no action in relation to these products on the grounds of cost is completely without foundation. We have continued to monitor the marketplace for these products while on retail inspections, but to date have been unable to locate any such products in Hampshire to purchase for testing," he said.

"Any information that these products are on sale here will be taken very seriously and investigated," he added.

In a separate development, **Marcia Teixeira** has said it has all but given up hope that the **Rapex** alert on its **Brazilian Keratin Treatment** will be lifted "any time in the near future" because of the ongoing process of presenting laboratory data to the Irish authorities, from where the alert originated.

But it has nevertheless launched two new products specifically for the EU market, **Brazilian Keratin Treatment EU** and **Chocolate Extreme Defrizzing EU**.



MARK HOLMES: WORRIED