

# What You Don't Know CAN Hurt You: The Dangers of Hair Smoothers for Salon Workers and Owners

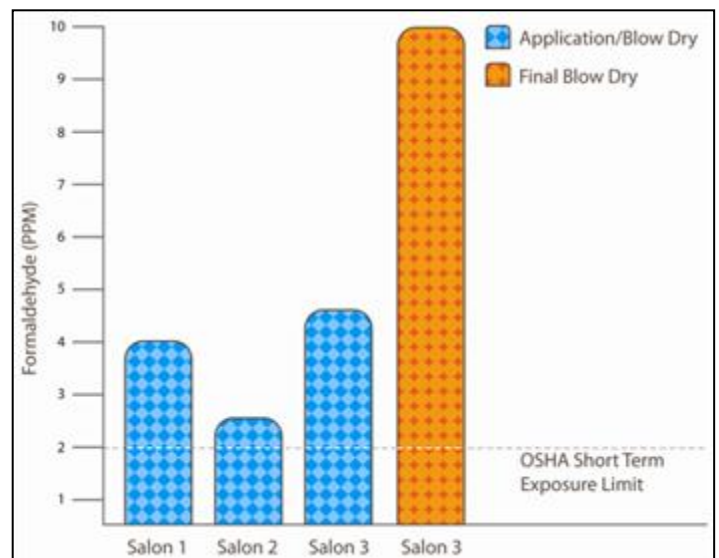


*Everyone knows the hype about hair smoothing products – customers love that “celebrity” hair, but some products put stylists at risk. Hair smoothers may contain the chemical formaldehyde, which can irritate the eyes and nose, cause allergic reactions of the skin, eyes and lungs, and is a cancer hazard. Find out why OSHA is reaching out to salon workers with hazard alerts and issuing citations and fines to salon owners...and learn how to protect yourself!*

## Concerns about hair smoothing products

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration ([OSHA](#)) has found that some hair smoothing products may contain formaldehyde, may release formaldehyde at levels above OSHA's permissible exposure limits during use, and may be mislabeled, all of which can pose health risks to salon workers.

OSHA has measured **unsafe levels of formaldehyde in the air at three salons** using [specific products](#) and issued citations and fines to the owners for failing to protect workers. In these three salons, Federal OSHA found that stylists using either Brazilian Blowout Acai Professional Smoothing Solution or Cadiveu Brasil Cacau were exposed to formaldehyde above OSHA's 15-minute short term exposure limit (STEL) of 2 parts formaldehyde per million parts air (ppm), putting their health at risk (see graphic at right).



In one salon, formaldehyde levels during the blow drying phase of treatment were measured at more than **five times** OSHA's short term exposure limit (STEL). All three salons were issued OSHA citations and two were issued fines for failing to protect workers from the health risks of formaldehyde.

OSHA has also issued citations and fines to other salons and beauty schools for using products that contained or could release formaldehyde and failing to follow the requirements in OSHA's

[Formaldehyde standard](#), including failure to test the air to determine formaldehyde levels and to provide workers training and information on the health hazards and signs and symptoms of exposure to formaldehyde.

**After finding formaldehyde in several products that did not list formaldehyde on the label, OSHA has also cited some manufacturers and distributors for incorrectly labeling the products** and for failing to list formaldehyde as a hazardous ingredient on the material safety data sheet (MSDS), the hazard warning sheet provided to users such as salon owners and stylists.

OSHA has identified several brand-name products that contain formaldehyde or that can expose you to formaldehyde during use, even though they may not list formaldehyde on their labels or MSDSs:

**Brazilian Blowout**

Acai Professional Smoothing Solution ([FDA Warning Letter](#))  
Professional Brazilian Blowout Solution

**Cadiveu**

Brasil Cacau  
Acai Therapy

**Copomon/Coppola**

Keratin Complex Smoothing Therapy  
-Natural Keratin Smoothing Treatment  
-Natural Keratin Smoothing Treatment Blonde  
-Express Blow Out

**Marcia Teixeira**

Brazilian Keratin Treatment  
Advanced Brazilian Keratin Treatment  
Chocolate Extreme De-Frizzing Treatment  
Soft Gentle Smoothing Treatment  
Soft Chocolate Gentle Smoothing Treatment

OSHA wants salon owners to be aware that if they use these products, they must take protective measures like air monitoring and training. Some of the products expose workers to formaldehyde even when the label states they are “formaldehyde free.”

Always check the label or product information. Formaldehyde might be listed as:

- methylene glycol
- formalin
- methylene oxide
- paraform
- formic aldehyde
- methanal
- oxomethane
- oxymethylene or
- CAS Number 50-00-0
- timonacic acid (aka thiazolidinecarboxylic acid)



## Fines and penalties

To date, [Federal OSHA](#) has issued citations to 23 salon owners and beauty schools in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois, New York, New Jersey and Ohio, with fines ranging up to \$17,500 for failing to protect workers from formaldehyde.

Citations and fines issued include:

- 3 salons that failed to protect workers from airborne overexposures to formaldehyde
- 18 salons and 1 beauty school that failed to protect workers from possible airborne exposure to formaldehyde; and
- 15 salon owners and 1 beauty school that failed to provide workers with information about hazardous chemicals.

## A salon owner's responsibilities

Salon workers have the right to a safe workplace, to understand what's in the products they use at work, and to know how to protect themselves from hazardous chemicals. When stylists use hazardous products, **it's the responsibility of the salon owner or employer** to follow OSHA's standards, including:

- [THE FORMALDEHYDE STANDARD](#) applies to all employers whose workers use products that can expose them to formaldehyde gas, liquid solutions, and materials that release formaldehyde. Salon owners must test the air during treatments to determine formaldehyde levels, provide ventilation and protective equipment for stylists, and train workers on the hazards of formaldehyde.
- [THE HAZARD COMMUNICATION STANDARD](#) requires employers to explain to workers the chemical hazards of products they use at work. Employers must have a hazard communication program, which includes worker training on the hazards of formaldehyde and any other products that contain hazardous ingredients.

## The best way...

The best way to control exposure to formaldehyde is to use products that do not contain formaldehyde. Check labels and material safety data sheets, but remember companies do not always properly list formaldehyde on labels.

If salon owners decide to use products that may contain or release formaldehyde, they must follow the requirements in OSHA's [Formaldehyde standard](#) to protect worker safety and health, including air monitoring, worker training, and good ventilation to ensure exposure levels do not exceed OSHA limits.

Salon workers should also be familiar with the contents of the products they use, the hazards those products present, and the steps they can take to help reduce their exposure.

## OSHA can help

OSHA's [new page on the hazards of hair smoothers](#) sorts out fact from fiction and explains how salon owners can keep their workers safe.

OSHA's [free consultation service](#) can also help employers to identify hazards and correct them. With this service, an OSHA consultant will visit your salon to help determine if there are hazards and work with you on correcting any identified hazards. On-site consultations are separate from enforcement and don't result in penalties or citations. OSHA also has compliance assistance specialists [all over the country](#) who offer help to small businesses. To request an on-site consultation or connect with a compliance assistance specialist, call 1-800-321-OSHA [6742].

Salon owners and workers can also request the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, at no cost, to help identify and correct any health hazard in the workplace through its [Health Hazard Evaluation Program](#). Contact NIOSH at 1-800-CDC-INFO [1-800-232-4636].

If you are a salon [worker](#) and believe you are at risk, you can file a complaint with OSHA by downloading and completing a [complaint form](#) and mailing or faxing it to your local OSHA area office or by calling 1-800-321-OSHA (6742). Complaints that are signed by an employee are more likely to result in an on-site inspection.