

Misconceptions Surrounding the Fragrance Industry

The need to communicate the facts about fragrance quality, integrity and safety to consumers

Steve Tanner, Arylessence Inc.

Recent assertions by consumer activists, environmental groups, anti-industry standard proponents and mainstream media are creating negative perceptions of fragrance that may have dire consequences for the fragrance industry. If facts about fragrance quality, integrity and safety are not widely shared and communicated, a very unpleasant image of the industry could prevail.

The primary driver of growth in the industry is the creation of fragrances that generate consumer preferences and lead to sales and profits. Fragrances not only create customer satisfaction and loyalty, but they also bring joy and happiness into the lives of consumers.

Unfortunately, that sentiment isn't shared by an increasing number of critics who are challenging the role of fragrance in consumers' lives. By basing their objections on emotional and subjective grounds, rather than relevant research and science, these critics seriously distort facts about fragrance and mislead consumers.

The Debate: Natural vs. Synthetic

While all-natural fragrances are promoted as healthier for the consumer and the environment, the misperception that synthetic fragrances are somehow unsafe is also communicated.

At Arylessence, we create all-natural fragrances for customers. We enjoy working with natural materials and find the characteristics exhibited by naturals to be irreplaceable. However, we also create blends that reflect the best of both nature and the laboratory. Our perfumers believe that removing synthetic materials from the fragrance repertoire is like deleting sharps and flats from a musical score or the color blue from the painter's palette. Both the music and the painting exist, but the beauty of the composition is severely diminished. Some of the world's most exquisite fine fragrances are blends of synthetics and naturals. Additionally, blends create consumer appeal for everyday products that fill the shelves of our supermarkets and stores.

As an industry, we cannot allow our exceptional work to be diminished. We must come together to communicate positive messages about fragrance quality, including the safety of natural and synthetic fragrances, the extensive



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regulatory measures that the industry takes to ensure product safety, and the benefits of our affiliation with the industry's safety authority—the International Fragrance Association (IFRA).

The safety issue: The dominant idea in the media and among many consumer groups is that anything natural is "safe." Lack of scientific support for that position does not seem to deter our critics, nor does the reality that many of the world's poisonous and lethal materials are entirely natural in origin.

Our critics conveniently ignore nightshade, strychnine, belladonna and botulism toxins.

Also, they overlook the improper use of some widely accepted essential oils, again natural in origin and actively promoted in place of synthetics, which certainly raise scientific eyebrows and put product safety attorneys on full alert.

Despite what our critics may think, it is scientifically unsupportable and therefore irresponsible to state or imply that synthetic ingredients are inherently more harmful than their natural counterparts.

Interestingly, life expectancy in the United States increased from 51.6 years in 1902 to 77.3 years in 2002. Synthesized materials and modern medicines have made a major contribution to increased lifespan. Consider insulin, amoxicillin and virtually any other medicine that people routinely depend on in our society. These lifesavers wouldn't exist without synthetics.

And thanks to synthetics, many precious resources on the planet do exist today. As part of a coordinated industry response, we need to emphasize the contribution synthetic fragrances make to the environment. Synthetics protect the sensuous appeal of our fragrances while allowing us to protect resources such as the Indian sandalwood tree, now banned for use in fragrance, and eliminate scouring beaches and foreshores for ambergris, now replaced by the synthetic creation of Ambrox.

IFRA's Role

The industry's regulatory system works on a global basis through IFRA, an organization focused on product safety. IFRA objectives are designed to protect both the consumer and the environment. IFRA-sponsored scientists

use rigorous scientific data to shape rules that industry members accept and support. This self-regulatory process establishes highly effective fragrance safety guidelines, which have been implemented faster and more effectively than could ever be achieved through the legislative processes of different countries working independently.

The 42nd amendment to the IFRA Code of Practice recently expanded safety standards to include more product categories and implemented a new risk-based system for assessing safe usage of fragrance materials. This new system, or Quantitative Risk Assessment (QRA), reflects the 16th century physician and chemist Paracelsus' original scientific observation that the right dose differentiates a poison from a remedy. The issue is not whether a particular ingredient may harm human beings (even purified water is toxic to humans if consumed at excessive levels). Rather, it is the level of safe usage that counts. Establishing safe thresholds is what responsible science seeks to achieve.

Identifying safe fragrance materials and appropriate levels of usage, IFRA is a valuable resource not just for fragrance creators, but also for consumer, industrial and institutional marketers who use fragrance. All of us are involved in creating, testing and manufacturing the same products. All of us are focused on product safety. No individual product ingredient can be considered apart from others.

Just as we create products together, we must share and communicate facts about fragrance safety, including the extensive testing of natural and synthetic materials, and the scientific methods we use to ensure consumer safety in every application.

In the past, lack of participation has led to poor legislation, such as the EU26 labeling requirement, which based standards on internet research rather than valid science. It has created a false impression worldwide that these fragrance materials have been scientifically determined as sensitizers.

Perfumers Share Their Preferred Synthetics

Check out the January 9th edition of *P&Fnow*—*Perfumer & Flavorist* magazine's e-newsletter—to learn about Arylessence's perfumers' favorite synthetic fragrances. The perfumers also share why these materials are irreplaceable, exquisite and have great effects in the finished fragrance. Don't receive *P&Fnow*? You can subscribe for free by going to www.perfumerflavorist.com/newsletter/signup.

Confronting critics who use emotions more readily than scientific facts, the fragrance industry would be wise to follow the example of organizations like the National Candle Association (NCA). When an alternative health magazine made unsubstantiated assertions that candles cause black soot deposition (BSD) in homes, releasing large black particles containing toxins such as benzene, toluene and phthalates that waft through the air and can penetrate deep into the lungs, NCA responded with science. The association sourced the world's most comprehensive and only scientifically disciplined study of BSD, conducted by the German Federal Environmental Agency and released in 2004, which dismissed candle usage as the root cause of BSD. NCA called upon facts, not emotion.

Improve Communication or Face the Consequences

As we—the fragrance industry—consider improved communication, our primary audience must initially be consumers, who receive more information about what we do from our critics than from us, and who take at face value everything they hear on the news or find on the Internet. If we don't share our fragrance story, we can be sure that nobody will do it for us.

We must inform legislators about the standards we adhere to, the research and testing we conduct, and the quality of the fragrances we create for consumers in every corner of the world. If lawmakers respect the quality and integrity of our products, they will be less likely to regulate our future for us.

Our clients trust us to create fragrances that are safe and successful. If vital notes and colors are removed from our creative palette, our creativity and flexibility are seriously threatened. In an instant, the essential appeal of products is at risk. To protect the future, our clients must become as focused on safe ingredient and product safety issues as we are.

Key Opportunities for the Fragrance Industry

- 1. Monitor consumer perceptions of fragrance.** Most emotional issues tend to grow quickly and dissipate slowly. Assessing what consumers think and believe is critical. An industry-sponsored study or survey can provide knowledge.
- 2. Work with experts and specialists.** Know the opinions of the medical, wellness, environmental and conservation communities. Listen to diverse perspectives. Encourage joint fact-finding. Share knowledge and respect science.
- 3. Communicate openly.** Tell the fragrance story. Promote balance and perspective. Provide information to all business influencers, including customers and consumers. Unless we provide information and access, our story will not be told.

Fragrances bring a little magic to life, making everyday experiences more satisfying, fulfilling and fun. But we can no longer take this simplistic view for granted in today's complex world. We must promote the creativity, quality and integrity of our fragrances and fragrance materials with facts, or we may be forced to live without them.

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