



Fresh-Faced Eco-Consumers

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FOR many customers in the Whole Foods Market on the Lower East Side last Friday night, just spotting the word “organic” on recycled packaging would have been reason enough to grab a bottle of moisturizer. But not Erin Schrode, 16, a founder of Teens for Safe Cosmetics, a nonprofit in Marin County, Calif. She was there to play host to a rally-cum-marketing-event she had organized with her mother, Judi Shils, the group’s executive director.



Donna Alberico for The New York Times
ORGANIC TREATS Goody bags filled with cosmetics at a rally on the Lower East Side.

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“Organic sells, natural sells, but what do those terms even mean?” Ms. Schrode asked. “You have to be much more discerning.”

Ms. Schrode and more than 100 high school and college students who attended are among a growing number who study product labels and Google suspect ingredients for before they buy.

Hard-core environmentalists might have blanched as the group distributed goody bags filled with lip gloss and shower gel from companies such as Weleda and Pangea Organics. But the girls didn’t just snap up the swag, they asked pointed questions of the panelists, including Jane Iredale, founder of Iredale Mineral Cosmetics.

“How environmentally-friendly is your packaging?” a young woman asked. “Is it true that plastic containers might leach phthalates into your products?”

Phthalates, chemicals used to make plastic more flexible that activists contend could cause hormonal changes, are a concern for these girls, as are parabens, preservatives found in many lotions. At present, there is little data supporting such claims. But just as the young [Al Gore](#) was swayed by the preliminary evidence of [global warming](#) presented by his [Yale](#) professor, these girls are hedging their bets regarding health risks that may take decades to emerge.

In the last two years, Ms. Schrode’s group has helped to pass a safe cosmetics bill in California. The law, enacted in January, requires companies to disclose potential carcinogens to the state health board. The group also pressured OPI to remove dibutyl phthalate from its nail polishes.

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But what of teenage apathy? "There are always people who would rather think about what party is going on," said Jessica Cele, 18, who wore gold L.A.M.B. by Gwen Stefani sneakers. "But I also hear a lot of conversations like, 'Why not bring your own bag to H&M, instead of using another plastic one?'"

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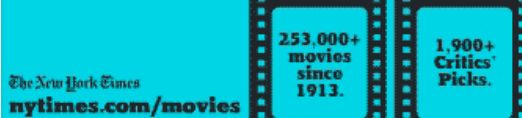
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