

THE DANGERS OF SOME ESSENTIAL OILS SOLD ON THE INTERNET

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During my searches for aromatherapy related subjects, I have come across thousands of sites selling essential oils. I was horrified by the number of businesses who are selling dangerous essential oils to therapists and the public without appropriate warnings.

"Appropriate warnings" is the most important issue. There is nothing wrong with selling many of our most hazardous oils for non-contact uses. However, I consider it unscrupulous not to warn people that these products should not be applied to the skin.

Here in Britain and in Europe, we have stringent laws that control what can or cannot be sold, as well as what medicinal claims can be made. It is an offence under our Trading Standards regulations, to place any product on the market, if appropriate warnings are not attached to the product. Despite that, many traders here do still ignore this important piece of consumer protection legislation. A few even break the law over no medicinal claims.

In the USA and Canada you do have legislation over label claims, and health claims, but it is widely ignored. I have heard it said on several occasions that you prefer to rely on "individual responsibility". Well how can a member of the public be expected to ascertain if an essential oil may be dangerous or not. This is particularly important when you consider that half the 'aromatherapists' around don't have adequate knowledge themselves of such matters. If **individual responsibility** is the main trading criteria, perhaps you should allow the general public access to plutonium so we can all CHOOSE if we want to make an H bomb or not!! Such ideas are just a trade get-out, so they can continue making money selling anything they can get away with.

Potentially Hazardous oils.

When I talk about hazardous essential oils, I am not talking about all the unsubstantiated hype endemic in aromatherapy. I am talking about hard verifiable facts. It is interesting that some of these facts originate from highly respected **USA based organisations** such as the International Fragrance Research Association. Therefore, it is not as a well-known US aromatherapy teacher said "oh yes they are very over the top on safety issues in Europe". Such teachers and authors say this, because they cannot stand it being made public, that their knowledge on essential oils is severely lacking.

The fragrance trade organisations do sterling work gathering data from adverse reactions reports and from testing the material in clinics around the world. **The aromatherapy trade has no such system to monitor adverse effects of raw materials.** Anyone that ignores such data is at best a fool and at worst unscrupulous, because they are toying with peoples health by ignoring valuable safety information.

When the RIFM advise a fragrance ingredient should not be used in consumer products, they are often referring to far **lower levels of use** than common in aromatherapy. By 'consumer products' this can mean soaps, detergents, lotions, creams, etc.

Here is a short list of dangerous substances that I have seen promoted on the Internet. This list does not of course include those essential oils like amni visnaga, ravensara, etc. and the fast growing number of 'chemotype' oils that no one knows if they are safe or not.

Benzoin resinoid and oil – a well documented sensitiser. RIFM recommend that only grades processed to remove the allergens should be used in consumer products. These grades are not generally available via aromatherapy suppliers. In addition, there is no such thing as benzoin oil; it

is always a resin dissolved in a solvent which is often synthetic.

Bergamot oil expressed – **a potent photosensitiser**—no not just sunlight, but ULTRA VIOLET light present even in dull overcast conditions. Two cases of severe skin reactions to this oil were reported to me in 2002. This is a disgrace when this oils dangers have been well documented since the early 1920s.

Cinnamon bark oil – **an extremely powerful irritant and an even worse sensitiser**. Still being used by home soapmakers in the USA and Canada.

Peru balsam – **a powerful sensitiser**. RIFM recommend "not to be used as a fragrance ingredient".

Rue oil – **a terrible photosensitiser and sensitiser**. Reported to be a "useful oil" by someone in the American witchcraft scene on her web site. Clearly someone who has no idea on safety.

Sassafras. This oil is restricted to only the minutest amounts allowed in cosmetic products throughout Europe. It is restricted to such low levels, that it effectively bans its use. The reason is because tests have shown it is a potential carcinogen. Of course, in the USA you are used to using sassafras bark in teas and flavourings, however that is not anything like as hazardous as using the pure essential oil.

Tagetes (sometimes misdescribed as calendula) – **a powerful photosensitiser**. RIFM say a no effect level is 0.05%. Therefore, to use it on skin exposed to the light would be foolish.

Tansy oil (*T. officinalis*) – **extremely toxic**, and of little if any use in aromatherapy. **Blue Tansy**, a different variety, is promoted a lot in the USA without any sound evidence of its usefulness and **no safety data of any kind**.

Verbena oil – **an extremely powerful sensitiser** – recommended by the RIFM "not for use as a fragrance ingredient". Massive percentages of adverse skin reactions are recorded from testing a whole range of verbena oils. The only reason most aromatherapists have not seen such reactions, is because only minute amounts of genuine verbena are around, most is semi synthetic. This oil has been promoted as being useful for years by certain aromatherapy teachers.

Wintergreen and Birch - two **highly toxic** products sold by many US sites in particular. Most without the required labelling warnings as per US law. Neither should these be considered a natural product.

Wormseed (*Chenopodium*) – **extremely toxic**. Banned from general sale in the UK because of the deaths reported from its consumption in the past.

In conclusion: If anyone comes across Internet sites or shops selling these dangerous materials without warnings please do tell them. Often they simply may not know, and may have relied for their knowledge entirely on the popular aromatherapy novels, or on some of the appallingly poor training courses around. That is the kind of marketing that can trigger over zealous legislation being placed on everyone.

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