

THE BATHROOM

Flush with ideas to cut down on oil use

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Elizabeth Douglass – Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

My bathroom is a key area in my crude-reduction quest. All manner of petroleum- and natural gas-derived soaps, lotions, perfumes, medicine, plastic bottles and instruments of hygiene (nail files, toothbrushes, etc.) cycle through there regularly.

"The extent to which oil and gas is involved in everything is breathtaking," Post-Carbon Institute President Julian Darley said.

I find that especially true in my bathroom.

Let's consider aspirin. The little pills are oil byproducts, according to the American Chemistry Council. Aspirin is derived from salicylic acid, which is derived from sodium phenolate, which is derived from phenol, which is derived from cumene, which is derived from benzene and propylene, both of which are derived from petroleum.

No matter. I'm not giving up *that*.

Until the next remodeling project, the infrastructure here is set. Whatever petrochemicals went into the production of my floor tile, shower and cabinets have already been consumed. The same goes for the sealants covering them. Instead, my purchasing habits are the focus.

These days, there's plenty from which to choose. The push for organic products has been building for decades, so now you can easily find shampoo, toothpaste, gels, hair spray, lotions, cosmetics and sunscreen, as well as cotton balls and swabs, without dyes and other chemicals.

Words such as "green," "natural" and so forth can be helpful cues, but only a few of those terms are strictly defined and regulated, so check the ingredients.

It's instructive that this month, the Organic Consumers Assn. reported that it tested 100 "natural" and "organic" products, and nearly half contained a cancer-causing chemical that is a byproduct of petrochemicals used in manufacturing.

The same caveats apply to the containers. But if the label is silent on the makeup of the plastic bottles and packaging, you can be sure they're not petroleum-free.

I browsed EnvironGentle, a store near my house that calls itself "Earth friendly," and I found several things I'm going to try when my current stocks run out.

Some of the items cost more, but many are on par with, or cheaper than, similar items sold at stores such as Crabtree & Evelyn.

For \$15, I could buy 32 ounces of Dr. Bronner's organic all-purpose lavender liquid soap packaged in a recycled plastic bottle. The label carries religious messages, which might not appeal to everyone, but it's a bonus that the company is local, based in San Diego County. At the Body Shop's online store, an 8.4-ounce bottle of Relaxing Lavender Body Wash costs \$13.