

**Reining in the Bulls with Michael Marx**  
**Interview with Stacy Malkan of U.S. Right to Know**  
**Recorded November 30, 2023**

**Name:** Stacy Malkan

**Current Title:** Co-founder, Managing Editor

**Current Organization:** U.S. Right to Know

**Title during campaign:** Communications Director

**Organization during campaign:** Campaign for Safe Cosmetics

**Name of campaign:** Campaign for Safe Cosmetics

**Date(s) of campaign:** launched April 25, 2004 at the March for Women's Lives in Washington DC (still going)

**Target companies/corporations:** Johnson & Johnson, OPI, Estee Lauder, Proctor & Gamble - we won concessions from all these companies and more)



**Summary:** Products we put on our bodies and our babies contain chemicals known to be toxic including chemicals linked to cancer, birth defects, infertility and other health problems that are rising in recent decades. We analyzed and reported on toxic chemicals in everyday products, pressured companies to reformulate, and engaged women across the political spectrum in lobbying to reform cosmetic and chemical laws.

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00:03 Michael Marx:

Stacy Malkin, welcome. Thanks for making time for this interview.

00:07 Stacy Malkin:

Thank you so much for having me, Michael. I'm glad to participate.

00:11 MM:

Good. What was the organization that you were with at the time of the campaign we're going to be talking about, and what was your role with them?

00:19 SM:

This was starting back in 2002, and I was the communications director for Health Care Without Harm, which is an international coalition of groups working to reduce pollution and toxic exposures in the healthcare industry.

00:41 MM:

What was the issue that really led you and Health Care Without Harm, and other ally groups to really launch this campaign?

00:53 SM:

We were working with many medical doctors, nurses, scientists at the time, who were very concerned about a particular chemical called phthalates which are very common. We're all exposed to phthalates through plastic devices, vinyl plastic. And there's big exposure through hospitals because of medical devices; IV bags and tubing are often shedding these chemicals into people's bodies. And even back then, this was 20 years ago, there were about two decades of very strong science showing that phthalates could have many health impacts. But the most consistent was problems with the development of the male reproductive system. This was through animal studies and also some corresponding data in human health data. But, when males were exposed to phthalates in the womb particularly, a suite of effects like birth defects of the penis, fertility problems, lowered sperm counts, et cetera, were a big concern for scientists.

01:57 SM:

There was new data that came out in around 2001, the Centers for Disease Control began surveying the American population for chemicals that were getting into our bodies. And one of the very first pieces of data, and the CDC scientists were surprised by it, they found that everyone was being exposed to phthalates. But women of childbearing age, age 20 to 40 were having much higher exposures, like double the exposures. And nobody knew why, because you would assume that we're all about equally exposed to plastics.

02:33 SM:

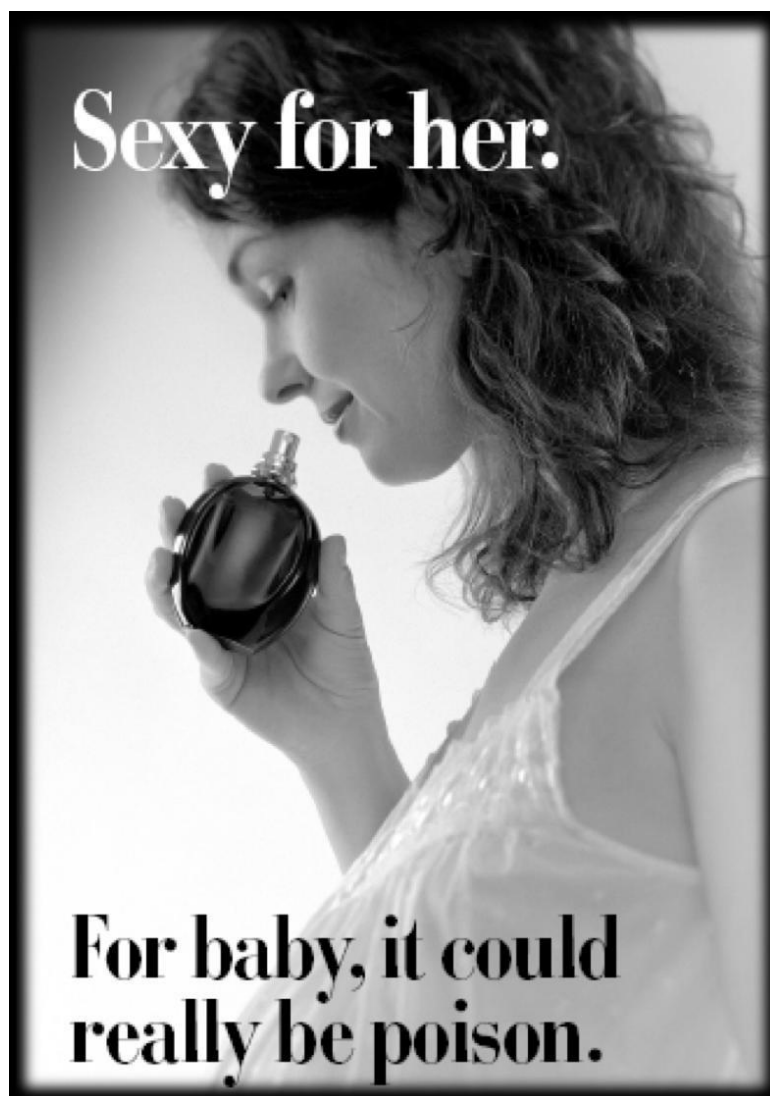
The researchers that I was working with, started to look at cosmetics -- could cosmetics be a major source of phthalate exposure? We did label searches and patent searches and didn't find it on labels, but suspected that phthalates might be lurking in personal care products. So we got together with a few other groups, EWG (Environmental Working Group) and a few others, and did a research project where we sent, I think it was 72 products to an independent lab to test them for phthalates. And this was a range of products from perfumes, shampoos, body washes. And lo and behold, most of them, about three quarters of them had phthalates in the products but not on the labels.

03:29 MM:

When you found that out, when you were able to document it, what industry did you focus on and what company did you choose to focus on in that industry?

03:46 SM:

Well, at this point, we had data that we wanted to share about phthalates, our ubiquitous and personal care products. We also had a funder who gave us money to put an ad in the New York Times. So that really upped the stakes of the campaign. We had a full page ad, it was very provocative—it was a picture of a pregnant woman sniffing a bottle of perfume. And the headline was “Sexy for her, but for baby, it really could be poison.” And it was this iconic bottle of perfume. And the Times did make us airbrush off the name of the brand, but many women recognized it anyway. The perfume was actually ‘Poison’ perfume. And the reason we chose Poison, because, I mean, it's funny, not funny, right? We chose Poison because it actually had the most phthalates of all the products that we tested, it had four different types of phthalates.



04:39 SM:

And so this got a lot of attention. We had a press conference at the National Press Club—the room was packed. It really got a lot of media attention. I was dealing with many of the reporters. And, I would get this very interesting question. I was surprised the first time, but then people kept asking it. The question was, “If these chemicals impact males, why do we have to care if they're in products used by women?” And so would literally have to explain, males begin their lives in the bodies of women when they're most vulnerable to toxic exposures.

05:18 SM:

And in the case of phthalates, that was very clear in the science that those ‘in utero’ exposures were very concerning. And of course, now, again, two decades later, there's so much more science linking phthalates to all sorts of different health problems, and we all are still getting exposed. But we do have impact in the cosmetics industry. And Poison perfume cleaned up its act, and many of the other products that we tested and exposed to the public, did reformulate to remove phthalates. We really saw that this was an industry that was very responsive to public concerns and could change which would then save many, many people from unnecessary toxic exposures. We decided out of that, to form a bigger coalition and launched the campaign for Safe Cosmetics in 2002. I think it was 2004 when we did our official launch with the new coalition.

06:13 MM:

And, oftentimes really to build a campaign and to build a movement, you choose a particular corporation as the target. And who did you choose and why?

06:26 SM:

At the beginning, we first did a lot of research to figure out what's happening in this industry. We did two major pieces of research. We sent over the years, hundreds of products to labs to have them tested for chemicals of concern that were not listed on label. That's a very common problem in the cosmetics industry: hidden toxins. Secondly, Environmental Working Group and a brilliant scientist there named Jane Houlahan created the Skin Deep Database. And I have a whole chapter in my book about how she did that, where she was literally sitting on a plane with a book, a huge book from the Cosmetic Industry Trade Association, 350 pages, listing the chemicals commonly used in cosmetics, but it was only available in this book that costs hundreds of dollars.

07:16 SM:

She was flipping through this book thinking we could turn this into a database and make this information public so that anyone can search for what the chemicals are in the products we're putting on our bodies, and how toxic they are. So she built the skin deep database, which was brilliant. It matches the chemicals in personal care products with the best scientific and academic databases of chemical hazards. Suddenly we had this massive, simple to use database to rank products from least to most toxic. We wanted to know, to get to your question, who's the worst company? And it turned out there wasn't an easy answer to that question because they're all using remarkably similar formulations, **all of** the top companies.



08:03 SM:

There's a difference in the natural products industry, so I'll put them separate—where there really was a lot of innovation going on for how to make products bubbly or lasting without the toxins. But in the conventional brands—all the big ones: Estee Lauder, Procter Gamble, Johnson and Johnson, even when people would ask me, what about Clinique? I would say, well, they wear doctor's coats in their marketing. They want you to think they're scientific. It's the same set of chemicals that the industry has been using for decades. And a lot of them are toxic and a lot of them are unnecessary. So we did various campaigns. We first targeted nail polish and we first got Procter and Gamble and Estee Lauder to change their formulations because we had a document from colleague groups in Europe. Having an international coalition of people that were looking and paying attention to this issue has always been important to this effort group in Europe, because Europe had banned chemicals that were known to cause cancer and reproductive harm in 2003 from chemicals. It was one of the first precautionary laws. The EU just said, if this is in your products, find a different way to make your products.

OPI's Miss Treatment USA series, now with Scrumptiously Low American Health Standards!

## Miss Treatment USA

by OPI



**OPI Awards U.S. Women with Some of the World's Most Toxic Nail Products!**

Why is OPI Products, Inc., the world's largest nail polish manufacturer, making safer products for European women than for Americans? Only because they have to. The European Union banned dibutyl phthalate (DBP) from cosmetics because the chemical is linked to birth defects. Unlike many other cosmetics companies, OPI refuses to remove this toxic ingredient from its U.S. product lines—we know because we asked their top executives in person.

And that's not all. OPI's Natural Nail Strengtheners has the highest hazard rating of all nail care products in the "Skin Deep" database of 14,000 personal care products.\* There's nothing natural about a product that contains formaldehyde, toluene and DBP—all three are on California's Prop. 65 list of chemicals known to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity.

When it comes to health and beauty, American women shouldn't have to choose between the two. Help us Give OPI a Makeover!

\*To find safer alternatives, visit the Environmental Working Group's "Skin Deep" report at the website: [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)

Paid for by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics

[www.safecosmetics.org](http://www.safecosmetics.org)

**What you can do:**

**1. B.O.B.F. - Buy your own brand!** OPI's "Buy your own brand" campaign is a call to action for consumers to buy OPI.

**2. Sign OPI's petition to Congress.** The Safe Cosmetics Act would stop using DBP, toluene, formaldehyde and other toxic chemicals.

**Send your facts OPI at:** [action@safecosmetics.org](mailto:action@safecosmetics.org) or call, toll-free toll OPI: 1-800-381-0000

**OPI Products Inc.,**  
USA (Union St.)  
Farmersburg, Ga 30628

[action.safecosmetics.org](http://action.safecosmetics.org)

09:25 SM:

That was pretty revolutionary. And some of the chemicals we were commonly finding in cosmetics were suddenly banned in Europe. A colleague group had a letter from Procter and Gamble in Europe saying, we agree with you that these chemicals are toxic, that's why we're taking them out, like Dibutyl Phthalate which was very commonly used in nail polish. We took that letter to the Wall Street Journal, and suddenly Estee Lauder and Procter and Gamble were announcing they're reformulating their nail polishes to take out, we called it the toxic trio formaldehyde, toluene and Dibutyl Phthalate.

10:03 SM:

So there was a huge shift in the nail polish industry. There was a holdout, OPI, which happened to be the most popular brand of nail polish

and used in lots of salons. They have fun nail polish names... and did an ad in the LA Weekly. It was a beauty queen with a sash that said "Mistreatment, USA" – the point being that consumers in the US were getting less safe products. And we brand busted their fun names with names like, "I can't believe it's a Carcinogen Coral" on things like that.

10:58 SM:

They did not like this at OPI. And again, like when we got the right media attention, and this case, I think it was an LA Times reporter calling them, they were suddenly shifting and changing their formulation as well which in the nail polish industry was pretty easy to do because we found out that they were ordering formulas from a couple of big central nail polish production facilities, and they just change the recipe. So we did get the nail polish industry to change its recipe and lots of people not getting exposed. And this is particularly important, of course, for people and women who work in salons. Many of them of childbearing age getting exposed to these chemicals in confined conditions.

11:46 MM:

I remember this campaign. So that's where you, the group really started.

11:51 SM:

Yeah, we did protest in front of OPI headquarters and dressed up like beauty queens. It was fun.

11:59 MM:

Good. And so how did the campaign evolve, or where did the campaign go next?

12:07 SM:

So then we looked for what else is really outrageous in terms of unnecessary toxic exposures. And we decided to look at baby products. Because of the research we were doing and Jane Houlahan was doing, we saw that a lot of products were contaminated with formaldehyde and 1, 4, dioxane, which are two carcinogens. And that was because of the chemicals that companies were using. Using formaldehyde, releasing preservatives, there's going to be



formaldehyde in the products, but it won't say formaldehyde on the label.

12:39 SM:

The ingredient, the chemicals they were using to make products sudsy have a contaminant called 1, 4, Dioxane, also a carcinogen. So we decided again, to do a broad sweep, across baby products and sent a bunch of them to an independent lab to have them tested. We weren't focused at that point on a particular company. We were looking at a whole product category to see what we found in the research.

13:10 SM:

One thing we found was that the most iconic baby shampoo on the market, Johnson's baby shampoo, had both formaldehyde, and 1, 4, dioxane in the product, as well as an ingredient that the FDA said shouldn't be used in products used near the eye. And this was like an orange dye number four. So we had in the report, it was called Toxic Tub, we had a little sidebar on Johnson's baby shampoo, but we didn't really focus on that product. But what happened was the response in the media from women's groups all around the world was outrage that this iconic product had known carcinogens in it. And this played out in a pretty dramatic way. We had gotten a lot, again, a lot of media attention. Reporters were always really good about covering the campaign for safe cosmetics and covering it favorably.

14:13 SM:

And we really wanted to reach women, and we wanted to educate them about the problem of toxic chemicals in general and what we can do in our everyday lives to protect ourselves. And then a second question: How can we turn that into political action? How can we get women voting for progressive and health protective policies? We got a story in the Associated Press about our report. It went global, I think it was on something like 300 TV stations all around the world. A grocery chain in China actually pulled Johnson's baby shampoo off the shelves. And so that was a very dramatic signal to the company. They actually lost revenues because of it. I think it was an annual drop of about 10%. So we had their attention for sure, and they were fighting back with trying to figure out how to rehabilitate their reputation from this.

15:14 SM:

And I want to mention one of the reasons why I think it was such an emotional response is because the company markets itself in very emotional ways. When women have a baby in a hospital, for example, often doctors were giving women Johnson's baby shampoo and other Johnson's products at this most vulnerable, most emotional moment of their lives. They're getting a message from the healthcare industry that this is safe, this is good for you. And to find out that there were cancer linked chemicals in the product that weren't necessary to be there, really just outraged a lot of people.

15:51 MM:

And you said the campaign prepared a report on this, and that's partially what got picked up? What were the campaign's demands of the company? I assume it was really 'cleanup this product,' but it may have been related to other similar kinds of products.

16:08 SM:

Well, it was reformulate your product. We did reach out to the company before the report went out. Afterward is when we really had their attention and the company wanted to meet with us. And so we did send a delegation twice to Johnson and Johnson headquarters to meet with company executives. And this was a broad coalition. So we had in our group scientists, we had representatives from the Breast Cancer Fund. We had the American Nurses Association. It was a powerful group representing the public interest that went to Johnson and Johnson and said, we're worried about these chemicals. I also knew from medical doctors that they had been meeting with the company for years to tell them that they needed to take out the preservatives they were using, the formaldehyde releasers. The chemical was called Quaternium-15, because these were experts in contact dermatitis. And their view, science-based experience was that people who are sensitized to formaldehyde, which is a small but significant percentage of the population, can have extreme reactions even to very low levels of formaldehyde exposure. And they were ignored. Okay, the company was ignoring them. And now we were in front of the company with our whole huge delegation, and we got essentially the same story. "We believe our products are safe. Everybody's just overreacting." They did, during this time – this was a period of about two years of kind of back and forth in the media, back and forth in meetings – Johnson and Johnson did launch a natural version of Johnson's Baby shampoo that was cleaner than the regular, priced lower than like the really good clean products on the market. So they're just seeing market opportunity, profit, take the space, but they weren't yet willing to reformulate their iconic Johnson's baby shampoo. So we realized that we had to ramp it up.

18:26 MM:

How did you ramp it up? And I'm curious if it was ramped up on multiple tracks, because we sometimes talk about there's a field track? There's kind of the scientific media, there's a shareholder track? There might be digital online track. So how did you ramp up the campaign?

18:50 SM:

And often you do need to go on all those tracks, come at it from every single angle. We certainly continued media outreach and specifically to female bloggers. I'm not going to call them mommy bloggers, but that was a term we used at the time just to say, that was really burgeoning community space at the time. And so they really carried the story forward online. We got lots of people using the skin deep database. We tracked what was happening with their sales in China and really had I would also say, somewhat of a disagreement within the campaign among people who thought, we'll just keep talking to them. And those of us who were saying, that's not going to work, we have to escalate. And, the turning point came, I was actually in South Africa working with the cancer Society of South Africa at a conference. And I was in a store looking at product labels as by then, like I always did. And I picked up a bottle of Johnson's Baby shampoo, and I realized they were not using the formaldehyde releasing preservative in South Africa. So I got back with our research team and we said, well, let's check this out. And so, again, our international collaboration really came in handy. We worked with groups around the world, 13 countries to have people buy Johnson's baby shampoo and then, look at the labels in some cases, translate the labels and see what they were using for a preservative.

20:22 SM:

Because that was one thing we didn't need to product test to understand if they're using a formaldehyde releasing preservative. It was Quaternium-15. Other names that other products use would be like Dmdm Hydantoin, or there's a range of them. But they were using Quaternium-15, which again, was like super sensitizing and dangerous for people who are sensitized to formaldehyde.

20:46 SM:

And so you could have skin problems or whatnot from it. Also releasing formaldehyde, which is a known human carcinogen. So what we found when we had the 13 products, and this was a very inexpensive, I sometimes call it the \$10 report that changed the multinational company because it just didn't cost us much. It was just buying 13 bottles of Johnson's baby shampoo and taking pictures of the label looking at it. And so we put together another report, about the fact that in about half the world, they were using non formaldehyde formulations. That was Europe, South Africa, countries on that part of the world. And then here in the US, Canada, Mexico – the formaldehyde stuff. We took this to a reporter at the Associated Press and she called up the company and we were getting ready to put out our press release. And I think it took one hour for Johnson and Johnson to make a global announcement that they were reformulating their product across the board. And they ended up taking out the formaldehyde preservatives, the 1,4 Dioxane problem cleaned up, and also the phthalates. They announced a whole range of chemicals that they were taking out of their products, and they got a lot of good press for it, I will say. And it took them a couple years to do it. And, we really pressed them on *why*. The why is because they have existing supplies to sell out. The why this is also interesting because it wasn't necessarily very difficult for these companies to change formulations. But people, they're very reluctant to change even obvious changes because any change costs them money. In 2015, I think it was, they were the subject of laudatory glowing press in the New York Times, saying they were cleaning up their products. And, from our perspective, millions of people had fewer exposures that are totally unnecessary to sensitizing and carcinogenic chemicals. So I feel good about that.

23:07 MM:

Before we move on, are other companies with competitive products, did they also have those kind of toxic chemicals and cancer causing chemicals? And did they also reformulate or follow Johnson and Johnson's lead?

23:26 SM:

Some of them did. I would say a lot of them did. But we still have these problems in products, and you really do have to look at children's products. We even found some bubble baths, for example, that were in PVC containers that had warnings on them not to sit in these chemicals for extended periods of time. I mean, just not good for children. So it has somewhat been cleaned up. The FDA finally, just in the last few weeks, came out with a proposal to ban formaldehyde from hair straightening products. And that's been a huge problem for years. Some very popular products like Brazilian Blowout. There was a woman in Canada whose hair

was falling out after she used this product. It was advertised by celebrities. It was all the rage. People's hair was falling out. And again, it was the formaldehyde because people can have really intense reactions to it if they're sensitized.

24:27 SM:

So she tested it and it was 10% formaldehyde gases coming out of this product. But the FDA couldn't do anything about it. They sent warning labels. We did, through the campaign for Safe Cosmetics, pass a law in California called the Safe Cosmetics Act that gave the state of California some more power to require safety warnings. So actually Kamala Harris, who was the Attorney General at that time in California, did go after Brazilian Blowout. She got, I think, a \$600,000 settlement from them and required them to put a warning label on their product, good first step. And now FDA's finally saying they want to try to ban it. It's slow going for the government to take action. But we have seen over the years, a lot of companies clean up their acts.

25:20 MM:

Now, is there still work on the part of the coalition to really institutionalize these changes like working with California, for example, FDA and others, to make inclusion of these compounds illegal?

25:39 SM:

We ran the campaign for Safe Cosmetics for about 10 years, pretty robustly with a coalition of people, of groups working on it, and some of us dedicated to it. Unfortunately that funding has kind of largely gone away. Some groups are still working on it. A lot of groups worked toward a federal bill which is too weak in my opinion. I think we have to, as consumers still really keep a vigilance into reading labels and pushing on companies to change. So we've seen progress and there's still way too many toxic chemicals in cosmetics that don't need to be there.

26:20 MM:

Were there big lessons learned in this campaign? Because it sounds like there was the nail polish campaign and then moved into one where it had to be much more aggressive on it, and it took longer. Big lessons learned in this campaign that you then took you to your next campaign, whatever that would be?

26:42 SM:

I think one of the main things we learned in the cosmetics campaign was the media attention was key. And these are brand sensitive companies, obviously. So this is particular to brand sensitive companies like the cosmetics industry. But people have many choices, and they just don't want to have it with the toxic exposures. And so, I think one shift that we saw was the natural products industry during this time, I said earlier, was really innovating a lot of safer alternatives for some of the biggest attributes that you want in cosmetic products.

27:17 SM:

And so that is a robust, thriving industry. And I think a public education on this topic helped lift up the good actors in the industry, and a lot of the big companies, what they did, how they

responded was putting out their natural lines that have none of the toxins, but they still keep their iconic toxic products on the market. So you really just have to watch out for that. And what I've learned, what I have personally learned is I don't trust the biggest corporations in America on anything. And Johnson and Johnson is a really good example. I want to talk also about the campaign I was involved in to get them to take their toxic talc baby powder off the shelves. But I just want to say, I just did a fact sheet about Johnson and Johnson and the talc issue, and I work for a group now called US Right to Know. So this is posted@usrtk.org. And I looked into all of the lawsuits against that company, and it is mind blowing the amount of times there was evidence the company had that a product was causing harm. They covered it up, they argued the science, they keep selling the product for as long as they can get away with it until they're sued. Payout millions, in some cases, billions in settlement. But at the end of the day, nobody got fired, nobody went to jail. They profited more than they paid out in settlement. So within the framework of what we consider success in corporate America, success in our economy, they were successful by continuing to sell toxic products. So we really have to challenge the entire paradigm of corporate power and what we consider to be a success in our economy.

29:06 MM:

I couldn't agree more. It's commonly what business refers to as it was a business decision. And the calculus suggested that we could afford to be sued. GM, many companies have made the same kind of calculus. I'm curious, you mentioned talc. That's a campaign that I remember as well. Do you want to talk a little bit about that second campaign and did it build on this campaign? Were there different groups involved? And how did the lessons from the first campaign perhaps influence the way you approached this campaign?

29:46 SM:

Yeah, so this was more recent. And, what's happening with talc, and again, this is Johnson and Johnson's most iconic product because it was actually the first product they launched their baby and personal care products division. I think it was in the 1800's. Johnson's baby shampoo with talc. And talc is a mineral that's mined, and is available alongside asbestos in many areas. And it's very difficult to get the asbestos out of talc. So the issue is, is the talc contaminated with asbestos. And there has been some evidence, including again, from Johnson and Johnson's own documents that they were aware of asbestos contamination in their talc supplies according to the documents. Also, the FDA had tested their products at one point and found asbestos contamination in talc. And so asbestos is a known human carcinogen. And, there are concerns about ovarian cancer, especially when it's used on sensitive areas of the body, which a lot of women have used this product daily.

30:54 SM:

So now 50,000 women are suing Johnson and Johnson, claiming that their ovarian cancers or other types of cancers have been caused by asbestos contamination from talc baby powder. So that's been going on. Again, fitting the pattern of how the company behaves in lawsuits. They're aggressively fighting it, they're denying it. But they did finally say they were going to stop selling talc-based baby powders in the United States. This was in 2020, I think. So, they



were planning still to sell it around the rest of the world. And a lot of their sales are in developing countries, Latin American countries, Asian countries. One other important thing that came out in the documents was that as the cancer concerns were growing around talc powders, the company was ramping up its marketing, particularly to African American women and also overweight women. So these documents coming forth in the trials, because trials open up the vaults of companies to have to put forth lots of documents.

32:02 SM:

And that's a, a big problem for companies like J and J. So they were having some big losses. They had a \$2 billion loss to a group of women with cancer in these lawsuits. And so they were nervous they were taking the product off the market in the US because they didn't want to continue to get sued. They said, it's safe, it's safe, it's safe. Well, we at this time, so this was 2020, it was really in the heart of Black Lives Matter concerns and companies making racial justice statements – we all care about equity, paying lip service to that issue. So we got together, and I was a volunteer on this campaign. We got together with some of the partners that we had worked with earlier, and particularly Black Women for Wellness in Los Angeles was really interested in taking this on in a leadership role and making the point that J&J needs to walk its talk on racial justice. It needs to not sell toxic products that it won't sell in the US to women of color all around the world. And it just needs to make a statement to globally end sales of talc powders now.

33:25 SM:

So that's what Black Women For Wellness said in 2020. They wrote a very poignant, passionate, wonderful letter to Johnson and Johnson explaining this perspective. Got some press coverage. J and J wrote back a pretty dismissive response. They said, we're not going to do anything about this. At that point, it became, as you were mentioning earlier, the many strategies focus on how do we get this company to move? And so Black Women for Wellness did media work, videos also. And this was over again about a couple of years. Takes two years to get a company to make a super obvious change that they need to make.

34:24 SM:

But it's worth putting in that time. We had a pretty vibrant shareholder effort that came about where there were two different shareholder resolutions. The Sisters of Mercy did a resolution on requiring or getting the company to do a racial justice audit. And then there was another shareholder resolution that year to get them to end global sales of talc.

34:54 SM:

And so that was a pretty aggressive effort on the shareholder resolution to end global sales of talc, which involved videos that were put out by the shareholder group, meetings that they were having with some of the biggest investor groups like Vanguard. Meanwhile, the Black Women for Wellness led campaign was doing media and social media pushing on Vanguard and other big investors to support this resolution. When the shareholder vote came about, the Sisters of Mercy Resolution did pass.

35:27 SM:

J & J is undergoing a racial justice audit, and this was the only shareholder resolution to pass that year. And the end of the global sales of talc did not pass. But, and this was interesting because I think what happened, because we were in close touch with the shareholder effort, that those meetings that they were having behind the scenes with the big investors did have an impact that the Vanguards of the world weren't willing to publicly say Johnson and Johnson has to do this but they were behind the scenes telling them Johnson and Johnson has to do this. And so a few months later, the company did announce that they were ending global sales of talc baby powder. So again, millions of women around the world not being exposed to unnecessary, and potentially very dangerous toxic exposures through talc.

36:26 MM:

It's good to get this example because it's not uncommon that shareholder resolutions have an uphill climb to get passed. But the conversations that happen back channel with the company from major investors often really move the needle on the campaign significantly. And, this is a perfect example of how that happened.

36:52 SM:

That was really interesting to see how that worked. And it was a really important victory. But as I said, trusting that company at all is not something that I would be willing to do. And in lots of places in the US at least in a drugstore, it's still the only option on the shelf for baby products. So that's another problem.

37:16 MM:

Were there any field track activities like demonstrations, non-violence, civil disobedience, or anything where people physically really sent the message to the company?

37:33 SM:

We did use that tactic on some of our campaigns. I don't think we did on the Johnson and Johnson's campaign – that was largely fought in the media and in the back channels with companies. But there were many young people involved in our campaign as well. And at one point they wanted to do demonstrations, and they chose a target that was important to them. And that was Abercrombie and Fitch which has lots of problems. But one of them was that they air spray toxic fragrance all over everything in the store, every 30 minutes.

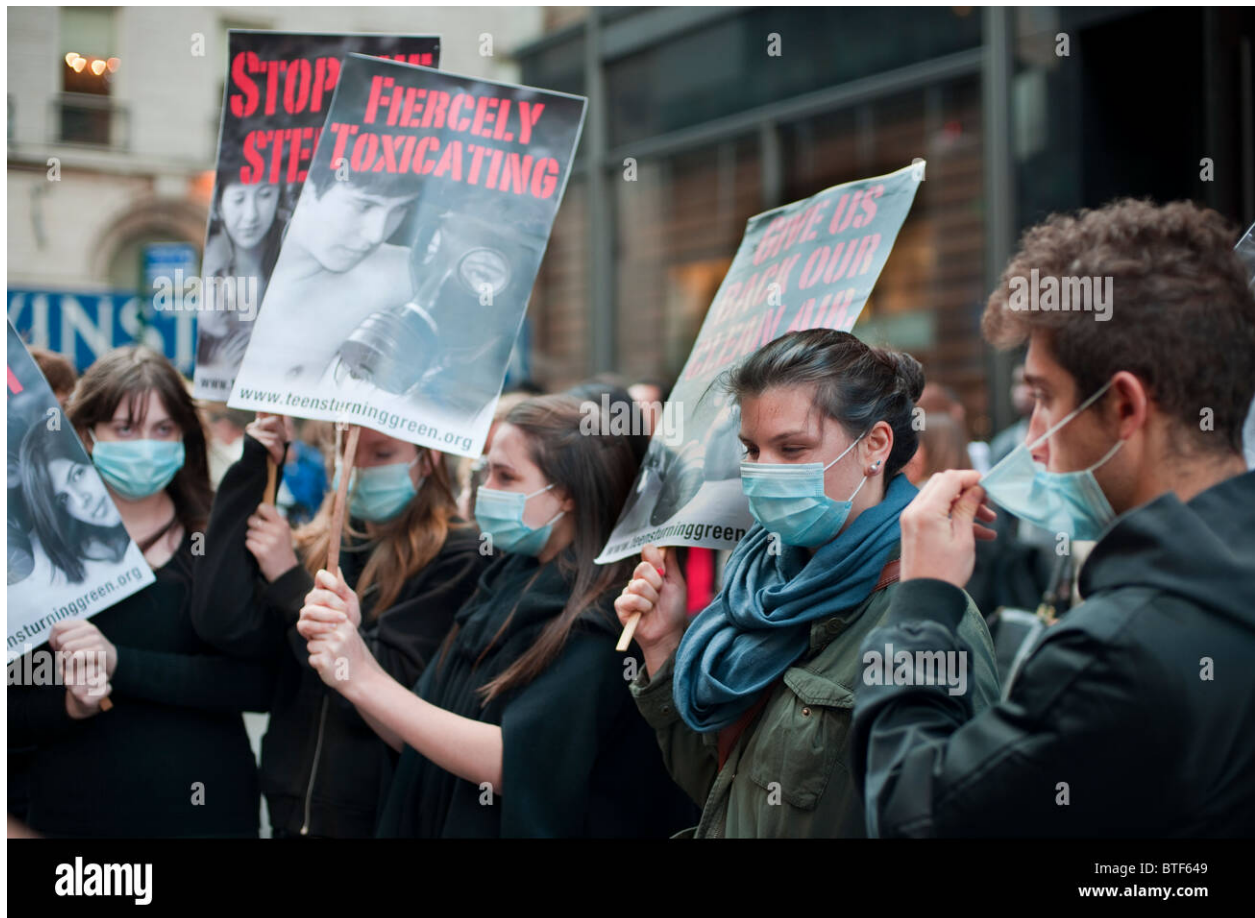
38:08 SM:

They also have, ironically, these photos of bare chested men all over the store. And it's this image, they're marketing themselves on images of virility. And we had tested their product and said, hey, this fragrance contains a chemical that harms the male reproductive health and well-being of men.

38:30 SM:

So these teenagers went to the Abercrombie and Fitch in downtown San Francisco on Market and Fifth – it's a huge store. And they protested with signs like, keep your toxic chemicals out of

my body. I have a right to be in your space without being sprayed with toxic chemicals. And this was fascinating. There were about 20 high school kids with signs. They marched around the store, they actually closed the store down, they kicked all the customers out, and police cars started to roll up. And, there was this young woman in the middle of the circle with a very tall police officer yelling at her about how she was trespassing on private property. And she said, "I'm trespassing? They're trespassing on me, on my body, on my right to health." That was just so powerful. I really think that that was one of the most inspiring things about the campaign, was the ability to reach young people and get them educated and excited about finding safer products. And also get them to see that these problems need political solutions. We need strong government policies to require these companies to stop using chemicals that they know are toxic. I really hope that we can continue to reach young people with the stories that you're telling here today because it's so important. And corporations really are vulnerable if you can find the right ways in to making huge changes that really can save lives.



40:05 MM:

We've seen a number of times where companies really are concerned about young people. That's a segment of the market that builds. They want to get them early so that they build brand loyalty over the long haul. Auto companies are a perfect example. So when you really

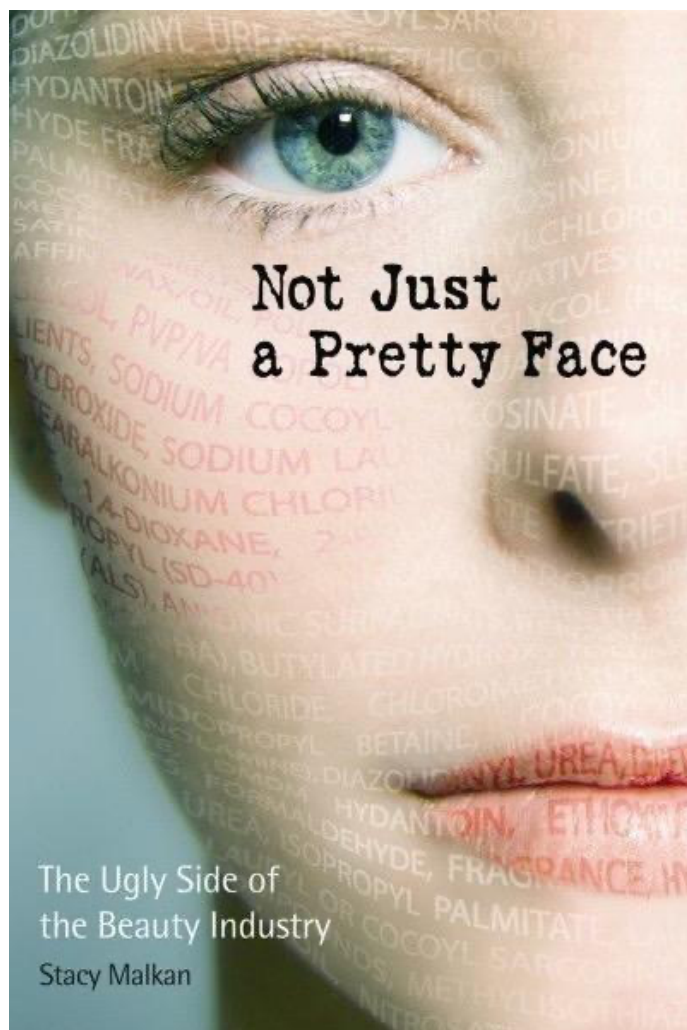
target that younger segment, that's that long-term investment that these companies are making and you're putting that investment at risk. This is a good story campaign.

40:38 MM:

Let's zoom out now. When you look back on these campaigns, the nail polish campaigns, the baby shampoo campaign, the talc baby powder and other products campaign, what are some of the big lessons learned for campaigners doing these corporate campaigns in the future?

41:01 SM:

Well, it takes a long time. You have to be in it for the long haul. I think media capacity and outreach really matters. So how can you engage the media in what you're doing. So doing research from the start that has newsworthy elements of it that will work with the press. And that was often for us, simpler storylines like the one toxic chemical and the one iconic product versus the broad problem. Sometimes that can get frustrating because we really are dealing with systemic issues. I think we need to find ways to tell the systemic story. We did that



through lots of ways with the campaign for Safe Cosmetics, through the Skin Deep Database. We did a movie with the story of stuff called The Story of Cosmetics with Annie Leonard, which is a wonderful, short movie. 2 million people have seen it. There've been lots of documentaries that we've participated in. I have my book from 2007 that tells the story about the campaign for safe cosmetics and how we did it. I did hundreds of talks around the country at universities. And those moments where you can be in the room with someone and really tell the longer story were some of the most gratifying parts of the whole experience, because I would have young people say, 'You made me look at the world differently.' 'I changed my major.' 'I just decided to start a company.' That was so inspiring. And we didn't also see a piece of our dream of political action realized. But that part was interesting because we reached such a broad coalition of women, non-partisan, many Republicans, many Democrats, many progressives.

42:54 SM:

We had very successful Republican women who were beacons in their community, meeting with Oren Hatch or other major political figures, fighting for safe cosmetics or toxic spill. So that was important. But I always wanted to take it a next step further. How can we have a common political vision that really requires an economy that protects health, that reigns corporations in to not poison people when they know they're doing it?

43:30 SM:

How can we get systemic fixes in place? That's harder, right? It was much easier when we were narrowly focused, we were making more progress. We need to continue to look for ways for how we take the narrow focus to the broad based changes that we need to see to protect the climate, to protect our health across the board from toxic exposures rather than looking one chemical by one chemical.

43:57 MM:

That leads me to the question I was going to ask: how did this campaign really influence the building of the organization, of the network, and ultimately, of the movement? It sounds like that last one, the movement and taking that broader systems perspective is the long range challenge.

44:26 SM:

Yes, it sparked so many wonderful things and awareness among lots of women who are carrying on the work with innovative online communities, with companies that they've started. There's a very strong effort still among women of color and black women's groups to point out that black women are exposed more to products because they're using more of and some of the most toxic products. I think that's a really important area of focus to continue with research and media work and alternatives.

45:02 SM:

For me, I switched in 2012 to look at food, and I did it in part because there was a grassroots movement in California that was growing around the demand to label genetically engineered foods. And it was a huge, vibrant group of women, like moms on the street petitioning in the rain to get that on the ballot. It was a whole bunch of very committed women out on the streets, and they were different women than I'd been working with on the cosmetics campaign. But the same issues, the same problems, the same solutions, a little more difficult with toxic food. So I was the media director on that campaign. It was the Proposition 37 ballot initiative to label GMOs in California in 2012. And one of the interesting things about that experience was I had talked with probably a thousand reporters or more over my years of working on cosmetics. And they were mostly friendly conversations and easy and often framed in our favor. When I switched to food, it was much harder. Some of the same reporters were like, don't talk to me about GMOs. I don't want to hear about pesticides in food.

46:16 SM:

And that was interesting and difficult. I think it was partly because the pesticide companies have done a much more intense job on propaganda and science manipulation. And it's a more emotional issue in general. Whereas with cosmetics, I think women were quick and easy to move to a point of outrage because we've been manipulated our whole lives by the toxic messages of this industry. It's a very good villain. With food, it was harder. And we did unfortunately, lose the labeling campaign. The opposition led by Monsanto spent \$45 million in the span of a month on just this massive blizzard of lies and confusion. After that, I was the media director and my boss, Gary Ruskin was the campaign director. And we were just like, what happened? How does this work? How do they do it? How does Monsanto have professors and Nobel laureates and all these people spreading their messages that it is obviously false?

47:23 SM:

So we wanted to like get under the hood of that. And, we launched US Right to Know a couple of years later and did lots of research including public records requests, and getting at documents that were being released in lawsuits, documents from whistleblowers to really try to put together how these industry propaganda and science manipulation campaigns work. We've done lots of work on outing the front groups, outing the industry friendly professors, explaining how many mainstream groups like the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, mainstream beekeeper organizations, lots of groups are carrying industry messaging and saying that the industrial agriculture, chemical intensive farming system is safe and necessary when the evidence shows the opposite.

48:15 MM:

I think your career path here also really illustrates how not only do campaigns evolve as yours evolved, but they actually moved to new industries with related kinds of issues. As you start to develop strategies and tactics in one area, and you make progress, it really educates you to the issues in another industry, for example. And you can kind of transfer those lessons learned and move over into that industry. I think we see that quite a bit. For example, I know campaigns going after fossil fuels, getting the banking industry to not fund fossil fuel projects, pipelines, et cetera, new coal fire power plants, but then getting it moving from their over to insurance companies and getting insurance companies not to cover those. And that was a different campaign. And then moving from there into the institutional investors and getting them to move. So going really in many ways upstream. I think you've provided us with a really perfect example. And I would imagine, when you look out, you see food as a big future opportunity in terms of campaigns.

49:49 SM:

Absolutely. And it really does take coming at the issue from many different ways. And that was a lesson I learned at Healthcare Without Harm, which was my first job. We were a broad-based international coalition, working on some very specific issues, closing down medical waste incinerators in the US was one of them. And that really took doctors and nurses and healthcare executives working in the boardrooms; it took pressure on the manufacturers that were making medical devices that were toxic and burning. And it also took protests on the street in

communities where incinerators were operating and showing those stories about community impacts. And that was a really unlikely crew of people to have together working toward the same goal. And in some cases, we worked together in coalition, and in other cases, you have to say let the thousand flowers bloom or let people do what they're going to do and not be connected in any obvious way.

50:49 SM:

It really takes all those creative bold strategies at once. And then, as you were saying, it's the same against all these industries. For example, we were talking with a group yesterday about how do we help protect scientists in environmental health who are getting attacked by corporate interests for the science that they're producing? And that's one of the tactics that Johnson and Johnson is deploying with the talc. They're actually suing doctors for reporting on asbestos in talc through scientific studies that were published in peer review journals. That's super concerning. I think these industries are under more and more pressure to extract the last resources available to keep their unsustainable systems going and will do anything essentially to keep the increasing short-term profits. And so, what can we do about that? They're employing many desperate tactics. That's what we see with the pesticide industry. I did hear recently that there were hundreds of people – this is journalists and researchers working in the space of climate misinformation. And I think that's great. And I also think, we need to be working together, the people who are looking at disinformation and pesticides and in human health issues. How can we make the bigger case that all these industries need to be reigned in and changed and that consumers could really boycott all of them and do well for helping us create an economy that respects and values life?

52:35 MM:

I think we're ending with the great challenge of corporate campaigns going forward and that is that so much of our work has been phenomenal and there have been literally thousands of these campaigns worldwide on different issues, but they're very segmented. They often do have a ripple effect through their particular industry. But there's this deeper change that needs to happen with the way corporations are allowed to operate. I think that's our next big challenge, to figure out what are those core rules that corporations have to abide in the area of environment, in terms of health, in terms of equity, and what are the standards and what are the ways that they're audited and independently reporting on that? And what are the ways that they're penalized if they don't meet those standards? I think that also represents an evolution in the corporate campaign movement of the last 30 years of where it needs to go into the next generation. And you've highlighted it. Thank you.

53:53 SM:

Exciting. I really look forward to seeing all your other amazing stories. This is a really important project.

54:00 MM:

And this has really been a fascinating one. I was fascinated with this campaign from the very beginning when I saw even the campaign against nail polish, I went, who would've guessed –



nail polish!? And then baby shampoo, same thing. You provided us with a lot of good insights, a great story, and I'm looking forward to getting this published so the story gets out and handing it on to the next generation of activists.

54:28 SM:

Thank you so much. I thought of one more thing that I want to mention just for context. But an important lesson that we learned was that policy matters so much and we had our victories because of policies that were passed in the European Union when Europe said, can't use chemicals known to cause cancer and reproductive harm in products that really didn't give US companies a leg to stand on. Although they tried to stand on it and then it collapsed. Like people are just not going to put up with that.

54:59 SM:

That was also huge in the electronics industry too, when they said, you can't make hard computer equipment with toxic heavy metals, lead, cadmium, et cetera, that's getting broken up in landfills and children are crawling on it. You can't do it. And the US electronics industry was like, well, we don't have to do that, do we? And their consultants were like, well, if you want to sell to 450 million people in the EU, yes, you will be reformulating all of your computer equipment, and so they did. And they will not do it in a lot of cases unless government policies make them do it. And then when they do do it, they end up better off in the end because less people are getting sick and harmed, less people are suing, and they look like heroes. I think that's really interesting when we look at electronics because, you know, Moore's Law, every year it gets faster and more efficient but it wasn't getting less toxic. That was not a value in the market until Europe said it is a value now. And there's a long way to go with that in terms of making health and wellbeing a value in the market.

56:06 MM:

Well, it's really an argument too for why some tracks of the campaign have to be geographical. If the EU is more progressive on these kinds of issues, then the campaign needs to really have allies who can push the campaign in the EU and funders who are not just American funders, but they're European funders as well to really support those allies. This is a really good example, and we've seen it so many times.

56:38 MM:

Most recently, for example, in a campaign we're involved with the Uber, Lyft and getting Uber to commit that they'd be 100% zero emission fleets by 2030. And the campaign was both in the US and in Europe. But the Europeans were the ones that made the progress, got Uber to make its commitment in Europe to meet those standards in all of the major cities. And then they had to follow suit in the United States, and then they had to add onto that. It'll be a little later, but we're going to do the same thing in South America and in Asia. You go to where the opening really presents itself.

57:27 SM:

Well, that's exciting. I really look forward to seeing your whole project. This is so important. Thank you for including me, Michael.

57:33 MM:

Thank you, Stacy. It's truly my pleasure and honor. And we'll talk again.

57:39 SM:

Likewise. Okay, great. Anything you need, let me know.

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