

PERFUME



ALCHEMY: A technician combines plant and flower extracts at a major perfume maker's laboratory.  
REUTERS/ERIC GAILLARD

New EU proposals threaten the ingredients of some of the world's most famous perfumes. But companies have tweaked formulas for years

# EU threat spotlights perfume makers' secret

BY ASTRID WENDLANDT

PARIS, DECEMBER 16, 2012

Luxury perfume brands fear the European Union is about to introduce measures that could cripple the \$25 billion global industry in the name of protecting consumers against allergies. New laws could severely curb or ban natural ingredients used in vintage best-sellers and put some perfume makers out of business.

But Brussels' proposed legislation - a draft will be unveiled early next year

- is also causing a stir for another reason. It sheds light on the best-kept secret in the trade: many big brands have been tweaking their formulas for years.

"It is a taboo in the industry. People are scared to say anything about it," says Fflur Roberts, head of luxury goods at market research company Euromonitor.

Until now, changes to perfume formulas have come as a result of increasingly severe restrictions imposed by the industry's self-regulatory body, the International Fragrance Association (IFRA), though ingredient shortages or cost-cutting have also played a part.

A new Europe-wide law would force even more severe tweaks.

The brands most affected will be those which have been in the perfume industry for more than half a century, such as Dior, Chanel and Guerlain. All those fragrances use many natural ingredients and were created before scientists started looking into perfumes' potential health hazards. Chanel's No.5, one of the world's best-selling perfumes and named after its creator's fifth trial, was created in 1921.

Chanel declined to comment on whether it has ever changed the formula of its world-famous perfume, as did Guerlain, Dior and luxury brand Hermes, which all make high-end perfumes using natural ingredients.

Most luxury perfume names do not want to disclose the fact that they have had to make tweaks to their scents for fear they could lose customers or damage their carefully nurtured luxury brand.

Perfume lovers, though, are hard to fool. "Consumers know their perfume better than any expert," says Jean Guichard, who heads the perfume school in Paris set up in 1946 by Swiss fragrance maker Givaudan. "We say nothing to consumers, but they notice when their fragrance has been changed and they may decide to opt for another product. Brands need to be careful when they reformulate their perfumes as they can lose consumers."



AT RISK: A plantation worker picks rose petals for shipment to Europe. Jobs may be lost if the EU restricts the use of rose oil and other natural compounds in perfume. **REUTERS/STOYAN NENOV**

If new, even stricter rules are adopted, hundreds of perfumes would have to be reformulated with synthetic allergen-free contents. That, many in the industry fear, could threaten their business.

"If this law goes ahead I am finished, as my perfumes are all filled with these ingredients," said Frederic Malle, who owns high-end perfume company Editions de Parfums Frederic Malle. The impact on luxury perfume brands as a whole would, he said, be "like an atomic explosion and we would not have the means to rebuild ourselves."

### EVOLVING PRODUCTS

Most fine perfumes are composed of a mix of natural ingredients and synthetic molecules. Perfumes are made up of a concentrate that is diluted with alcohol, usually from beetroots.

Changing a scent can cost several hundred thousand euros depending on the complexity of the original formula. Perfume makers say that replacing natural with synthetic ingredients is rarely an improvement.

Since its creation in 1973, the IFRA, which is financed by scent makers such as Givaudan, New York-listed International Flavors & Fragrances, and Germany's

## Big Scents

Top Ten Market Share in 2011

<b>Chanel</b> Chanel	<b>7.6%</b>
<b>Christian Dior</b> LVMH	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Calvin Klein</b> Coty	<b>5.1</b>
<b>Giorgio Armani</b> L'Oréal	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Estée Lauder</b> Estée Lauder	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Hugo Boss</b> Procter & Gamble	<b>3.5</b>
<b>Yves Saint Laurent</b> L'Oréal	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Dolce &amp; Gabbana</b> Procter & Gamble	<b>2.6</b>
<b>Paco Rabanne</b> Puig	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Elizabeth Arden</b> Elizabeth Arden	<b>2.2</b>

Source: Euromonitor

Symrise, has restricted natural ingredients for a range of health reasons, from worries about allergic reactions to cancer concerns.

"Most perfumes which are 20 years old or more will have already been reformulated several times because science has evolved and we want to ensure the safety of consumers," said IFRA president Pierre Sivad.

Many traditional essences that perfume creators consider core to their craft have been blacklisted in recent decades. Birch tar oil was removed from Guerlain's Shalimar several decades ago because it was thought to be a cancer risk. Clove oil and rose oil, which contain a component called eugenol, and lavender, which contains linalool, may only be used in limited quantities in case of allergies.

And oakmoss, one of the most commonly used raw materials because of its

rich, earthy aroma and ability to 'fix' a perfume to make it last longer, has been increasingly restricted because of worries about skin sensitivity.

That means perfumes like Shalimar, Chanel's No. 5, Dior's Eau Sauvage and Poison, Yves Saint Laurent's Opium and Cacharel's Anais Anais are only a shadow of their original, olfactory selves, according to industry experts.

"Eau Sauvage was a real chef d'oeuvre in its original form," retired perfume-maker Pierre Bourdon, who created Dior's Dolce Vita and Yves Saint Laurent's Kouros, said of the 1966 scent. "It used to be very green and fresh. Today, it has been replaced by something softer and duller."

He contends the scent has been stripped of furocoumarins, a class of organic chemical compounds produced by plants like bergamot that can cause dark spots on the skin when exposed to the sun.

Bourdon said he still wore Eau Sauvage because it reminded him of his father, Rene, who as deputy head of Dior perfumes in the 1960s and 1970s supervised the creation of the perfume.

Raymond Chaillan, who collaborated on the creation of both Anais Anais and Opium, believes both have changed. When it was launched in 1977, the original Opium was full of eugenol and also contained linalool, and limonene found in citrus. In large doses, Eugenol can cause liver damage, while oxidised linalool can cause exzema and prolonged exposure to pure limonene can irritate the skin.

Edouard Flechier, who created Dior's Poison in 1985, says that fragrance has changed since its inception.

"I know the original formula by heart and I imagine they (Dior) had to change progressively because of new IFRA regulation."

Natural ingredients are more supple than synthetic ingredients and give more depth to a perfume as well as a subtle play on various notes, says Malle, adding that IFRA restrictions have cost him "hundreds



NATURAL ESSENCE: Rose petals are distilled to make rose oil, a key ingredient in many popular perfumes. REUTERS/ BOGDAN CRISTEL

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Head of luxury goods at market research company Euromonitor

of hours” and “endless tests.”

If the industry largely got away with quietly tweaking its fragrances up till now, however, experts say that will be impossible if Europe backs the proposals aimed at wiping allergenic substances from the perfume-makers' palettes altogether.

**ALLERGIES**

Brigitte Aubert, a 68-year-old Parisian interior decorator, gave up Shalimar in the 1980s after developing an allergy to it.

“My neck became all red but I continued wearing Shalimar for a long time. It was part of my identity, I couldn't just give it up,” she said. “It reminded me of those carefree days of Paris in the 1960s.”

Aubert is one of an estimated 5 million to

15 million people, or 1 to 3 percent of the EU population, who are allergic or potentially allergic to natural ingredients contained in fine perfumes, according to a report published in July by the Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS), an advisory body for the European Commission. Symptoms can range from severe rashes to blotches to hayfever-like symptoms.

Europe is not the only region to look more closely at the impact of fragrance. Earlier this year Republican lawmaker Michele Peckham from New Hampshire proposed a bill in the state House to ban state employees who have contact with members of the public from wearing strong fragrances.

The bill did not pass, but other lawmakers are considering reintroducing similar legislation. Meanwhile the city of Portland in Oregon has asked public workers and citizens visiting and using public spaces to limit their use of scented products.

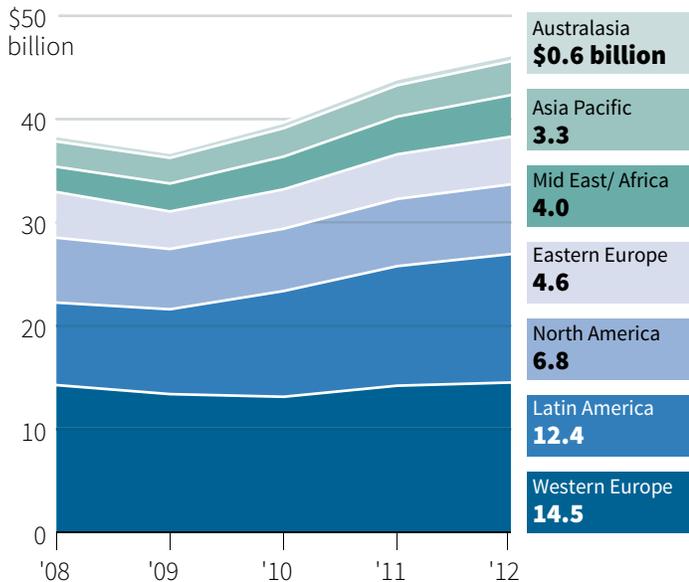
Some hospitals in the U.S. have also introduced bans on using perfumes.

The SCCS, whose recommendations Reuters was first to report in October,

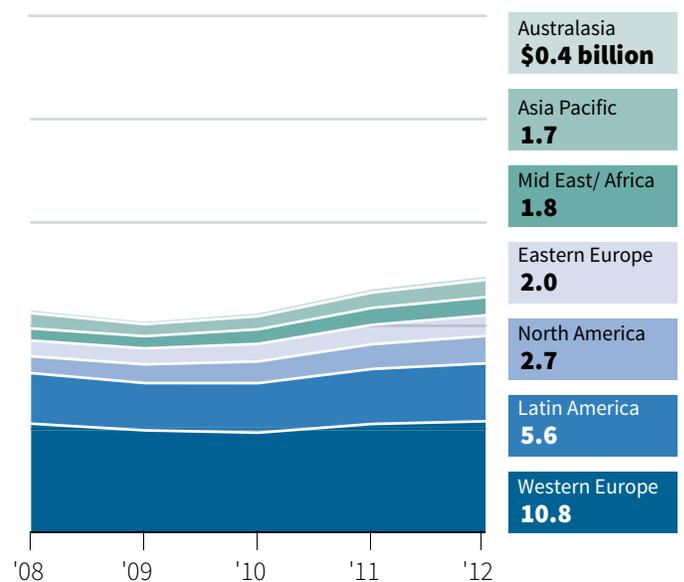
# Perfuming the world

Growth in global markets

## OVERALL FRAGRANCE MARKET



## PREMIUM FRAGRANCE



Source: Euromonitor

recommended that 12 substances used in hundreds of perfumes on the market today be limited to 0.01 percent of the finished product, a level perfume makers say is unworkable. The SCCS has proposed a total ban on tree moss and oakmoss, which scientists say are strong allergens.

If the SCCS's recommendations are enforced by the European Commission, IFRA estimates some 9,000 perfume formulas would have to be changed.

The legislation could also hit essence-providers and plant-growers in places like Grasse in the South of France as well as in Haiti, Indonesia and Madagascar. Chanel owns fields of roses and jasmine in the Grasse region to guarantee supplies and mixes its harvests from previous years to ensure the scent remains the same as it can vary depending on how much sun or rain there was.

Patrick Saint-Yves, president of the French Society of Perfume Creators (SFP), is furious about the recommendation.

"I simply find that there is a huge contradiction," Saint-Yves says. "We encourage the use of many essential oils such as lavender in aromatherapy for massages, but we want to ban it in perfumes. Shops continue to sell alcohol and cigarettes which do much more harm."

Part of the problem is the secrecy surrounding perfumes. Most perfume brands are reluctant to label their products. Unlike

5-15 million

estimated number of people in the EU who are allergic or potentially allergic to natural ingredients contained in fine perfumes.

Source: Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS)

artists and writers, perfume creators have no intellectual property rights to the fragrances they compose for big brands, and so perfume brands fight hard to keep their formulas hidden.

Consumer groups were behind an amendment to an EU law in 2005 forcing perfume brands to label any of 26 potentially allergenic ingredients. The brands now list those ingredients - in Latin. Now the SCCS is proposing to extend that list to more than 100 potential allergens.

### INDUSTRY SPLIT

The proposals have also revealed schisms in the perfume industry - a lack of unity that makes it harder to lobby with one voice.

Brand owners such as Chanel and LVMH and scent-makers such as Coty, L'Oreal, Procter & Gamble, Givaudan and Symrise all have different goals.

LVMH, which owns Dior and Guerlain, and Chanel are lobbying



DECONSTRUCTION: A worker takes apart an advertisement for Chanel. Almost a century old, its famous No.5 fragrance may have to be reworked.

REUTERS/BENOIT TESSIER

Brussels to protect their perfumes, many of which were created decades ago.

“It is essential to preserve Europe’s olfactory cultural heritage,” LVMH told Reuters in an emailed statement.

L’Oreal, however, already uses many synthetic ingredients in its perfumes and is thus keeping a low profile on the issue, industry representatives said.

Other companies making perfumes on an industrial scale for luxury brands, such as IFF, Givaudan and Firmenich, are less concerned about the SCCS proposal because they can rely on synthetic materials and make new perfumes using them but the restrictions, if enforced, would force them to reformulate many of their scents on a scale never seen before.

Givaudan and L’Oreal declined to comment for this report.

For now, the European Commission says it is only “reflecting” on how to translate the recommendations into legislation and stresses it is not planning to ban any particular perfume.

Ignoring the recommendations altogether would be difficult. The European Consumer Group (BEUC) has welcomed the SCCS’s report as a “thorough and evidence-based study” that is a starting point for the decisions ahead.

A senior director at a leading luxury perfume brand said the brand’s own scientists had noticed an increase in the frequency of allergies in the past 15 years, partly due to pollution and nutrition.

“It is true we live in a world now in which dermatologists simply recommend not using any perfume at all,” the perfume executive said.

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