

What all nail professionals should KNOW AND DO ABOUT MMA

By Doug Schoon, Chief Scientific Advisor, Creative Nail Design, Inc.

For over two decades the American professional nail industry has been struggling to stop the improper use of methyl methacrylate (MMA) monomer in artificial nail enhancements. Even so, MMA is still widely used across America. Why? The American nail industry made many mistakes dealing with this important issue and these missteps allowed MMA monomer to thrive, despite numerous bans and prohibitions. I'd like to outline the top five mistakes and propose some recommendations to help the Australian professional nail industry avoid repeating these errors.



1 American nail technicians rallied against MMA monomer for the wrong reasons.

Problems started when nail professionals realised that MMA monomer products sell for up to 75 per cent less than the high quality, legal alternatives- allowing salons using MMA to undercut their service prices. Because of this, MMA monomer became an emotional issue and arguments against its use were not based on factual information. Rather than getting to grips with the facts many nail professionals lashed out and began spreading misinformation about MMA monomer. Some claimed MMA caused cancer, birth defects or was highly toxic; all of which are untrue. MMA is used by doctors internationally and is considered the best and most widely used bone cement in the world. It may make a very safe and useful bone cement, but MMA monomer is lousy for artificial nails.

HERE ARE THE TOP REASONS WHY MMA MONOMER SHOULD BE AVOIDED:

- a. MMA monomer products do not adhere well to the natural nail unless the nail plate is aggressively (and irresponsibly) abraded or roughed up. This practice thins and weakens the natural nail plate, setting clients up for future problems, i.e. separation of the plate from the nail bed (onycholysis).
- b. MMA artificial nails are extremely difficult to remove. MMA products become brittle and discolor quickly and must be removed every three or four months, increasing the risk of nail damage, especially when removed by prying product from the nail plates, a practice that leaves them overly thin and damaged.
- c. MMA artificial nails are extremely rigid and difficult to break. When jammed or caught, the overly thinned natural nail plate often breaks before the MMA enhancement, which may lead to serious nail damage and infection.

2 The American nail industry assumed that government bans and prohibition would put an end to MMA use.

We were disappointed to learn that regulations are meaningless if they are not enforced. The sad truth is, there are not enough inspectors to monitor all of the salons and it's difficult for most inspectors to know when MMA is being used. In the United

States, it's unlikely that salons will be fined or shut down for using MMA. Regulations alone have proven to be a very ineffective way to control this problem.

3 Nobody bothered to shut down the importers/suppliers. All the attention was placed on salons and technicians, not importers or suppliers of MMA who continued raking in huge profits, selling MMA through an underground market. The only way to stop the influx of MMA monomer is to shut down the importers and suppliers- the real culprits! Until stiff fines and serious consequences are imposed on importers and suppliers, this will continue. The government must (consistently) make it risky and unprofitable for these suppliers or the problem will escalate.

4 We didn't properly educate nail professionals about why MMA monomer shouldn't be used.

Nail professionals who use MMA monomer products are often uneducated about proper procedures for nail plate preparation, controlling product application, proper maintenance and safe removal. They often use unsafe practices, work in unsanitary conditions and rarely receive continuing education. Even if they changed to non-MMA products, they still won't understand proper preparation, application or removal and will continue to work and use unsanitary practices. These technicians need proper education, not a slap on the hand or a small fine. Their lack of proper education is just as big a risk to our industry as MMA monomer products.

"I RECOMMEND that all nail professionals JOIN AND SUPPORT THE APFA, Australian Professional Fingernail Association (www.apfa.net.au). This organization REPRESENTS ALL NAIL PROFESSIONALS and they're WORKING HARD to improve the industry."

5 We didn't involve or educate the consumer in a positive way. Consumers don't know the difference between MMA, EMA or BMA and don't care. In the consumer's mind, they're all artificial nails, so clients will associate MMA misinformation with all artificial nail products. Never tell clients that MMA causes cancer or birth defects. These untrue myths harm the entire professional nail industry. Artificial nail products don't cause cancer or birth defects! The client needs to understand the disadvantages of wearing MMA enhancements, not hear scary stories and myths. The client needs to understand why they should avoid patronizing salons that use MMA products- non-MMA products are superior and better for the nail plate. Remember, the client is the very best inspector and our best defense against salons that use MMA monomer. Before our industry can grow, clients must understand the truth about MMA enhancements and why they should be avoided.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Educate yourself, other nail professionals and clients about these issues. Explain that artificial nail products should never cause the problems described above — no matter what is used. Explain that you avoid these potential problems by using high quality products and proper procedures, and then set a good example by ensuring your services are safe and sanitary. Explain that it is not normal for artificial nails to be removed every three or four

months due to brittleness and discoloration; instead, these are signs of poor quality products and improperly performed services. Clients should never feel pain, skin redness or irritation; suffer injury or natural nail damage as a result of any nail service.

Finally, I recommend that all nail professionals join and support the APFA, Australian Professional Fingernail Association (www.apfa.net.au). This organization represents all nail professionals and they're working hard to improve the industry. Want to see our industry grow and prosper? The best way is to be involved, informed and well educated. That's everyone's professional responsibility! ■

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