

Buying Essential Oils - and Absolutes.

By the late Bernie Hephrun

Note: This article by Bernie is a few years old, but it is still very informative, most parts remain valid and it is a better insight into the REAL trade in aromatic oils than most aromatherapists and natural perfumers get.

Start.

If you are buying essential oils and absolutes it can appear to be a somewhat daunting experience. Today there are the numerous distributors varying from the national supermarkets to individual aromatherapists, aromatherapy companies, schools, clinics, and traders. Words appear such as 'pure', 'true', 'natural', 'organic', 'Certificated', 'tested', 'approved by', dynamic aroma and so on. Only a few of these terms are defined. All this coupled with the vast array of essential oils can present difficulties in understanding the way in which essential oils get to the ultimate user. Sometimes you will have been advised on how to buy oils by a tutor if you were on an aromatherapy course. However, the world of essential oils, perfumes and flavours is quite complex and sound information does not come easy. Worse, there is an awful lot of information around which is either confusing or conflicting. The central thing to remember is that essential oil crops are very similar to other agricultural crops and therefore there need be no mystique about the subject.

Like all plant produce, the supply chain can be fairly long, but it is important to see how it operates. Then as with all human activity there may always be charlatans along the way who want to make a quick 'buck' at your expense and lack of information. The object of this brief article is to try and dispel some of the mythology which has grown up over the years.

Briefly the chain of supply includes :

1. The Grower or original 'collector'.
2. The Distillation Unit.
3. The Trading Chain
4. The Oil Companies.
5. The Aromatherapy Companies.
6. The End User. Aromatherapists, Clinics, Schools, Shops, Supermarkets, the public.

1. THE GROWER OR PRODUCER.

The grower or producer of the plants which produce an essential oil or absolute are principally concerned with several factors. They need to grow an enormous number of plants which can be harvested at a certain time of the year. The grower may have to invest large sums of money to prepare the land, seed or plant, greenhouse cultivation, careful plant nurturing, cropping and preparations for distillation. Growing plants presents its own set of difficulties. Many books and Courses can stress the botanical name of a plant and although this is a useful guide for many plants the name may not apply. The grower is concerned with growing a specific type of plant which will produce an oil when distilled.

Moreover, they will want to produce an oil acceptable to the market place. In many countries the cultivar is one which may be chosen locally for its growth habit and this includes its regeneration, longevity and ability to withstand climatic conditions. This may be quite different from the 'original stock' as identified by its 'Species name'. The oil distilled from the plant stock may vary from the original. In some cases the cultivar may change to produce an oil with a specific oil composition. This would then be known as a chemical race or chemotype. As every gardener knows, 'sports' appear from time to time which are often different in colour, habit and growth pattern from plants of the same species. If these look encouraging, the farmer could use these 'sports' to obtain cuttings of them and produce a whole family of offsprings from them. In this way 'clones' are introduced into the market place which may produce essential oil quite different from the original plant stock.

Whilst it is useful to have the scientific Latin name for a plant, it cannot be assumed that it is

correct for the plant which is growing in the field. Geranium is a case in point where the names often quoted may be incorrect. Although *Pelargonium graveolens* is normally listed for Geranium oil (Only *P. capitatum* and *P. peltatum* is given for INCI name) it is highly unlikely to exist any longer. It takes about ten years for a country's National Committee to get a name approved by the International Botanical Nomenclature Organisation. To further confuse matters, different Legislative Bodies do not agree on names of certain oil plants. You will find that Brussels gives Mandarin (*Citrus aurantium* sp) as *Citrus amara* and Grapefruit (*Citrus paradisi*) as *Citrus grandis*. Names in books are not always correct.

The economics of oil production are world wide and the competition can be quite severe. If massive amounts of Chinese Geranium oil are produced, the price may fall and this can affect the ability of Egypt to sell their Geranium oil at a competitive price. There is always a demand for land to be used for house building and industrial uses and this puts pressure on that land so that if the price falls, it may be uneconomic to grow the plants for oil. Similarly, if the workers on the field are not paid a good wage, they will simply not work for very low wages.

Other crops can be affected by natural disasters such as fire, political turmoil and production changes. Indonesia had a series of destructive fires during 1997 which resulted in very little Patchouli oil (*Pogostemon patchouli*) being produced. Increased demands for spicy foods and flavours for use in potato and other crisps increases the demand for Pepper oil and other spice oils. This puts pressure on certain oils which invariably increases the price as demands exceed supply.

Trees present a different set of values. They normally have a long life and therefore the oil tends to have a relatively stable composition. Indian Sandalwood (*Santalum album*) for example can grow for about 70 years before it is cut down to use the heartwood which contains the oil. Though due to the continued loss of trees new experiments are being made to produce plantations of younger trees. However, because the growth period is so long and the demand exceeds supplies, the Indian Governments attempts to reduce production has led to pirates cutting trees illegally and available oil being 'extended' by unscrupulous traders. This is also occurring with the Brazilian Rosewood tree (*Aniba rosaeodora*) (syn Bois de Rose) as the tree continues to be cut down in the Brazilian Forests. Plantations to grow the trees and use the leaves appear to be successful in producing an oil which is very close to the original. This is being done in Guyana. This trend is likely to expand as the demand for the oil continues. Tea Tree Oil (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) which is currently undergoing an enormous expansion programme is now almost exclusively grown in plantations which can be coppiced regularly. The original tea tree oil was taken from virgin stands of trees in New South Wales, a practice which now goes against the 'green' and conservation lobby and is also not regarded as very ethical from an ecological point of view. It is also illegal, but difficult to control. A sad fact is that pharmacists in Australia now require it to be labelled as a poison.

If people tell you 'they have their own plantations' forget it. Strange thing - the prices are always hiked up and advertised as 'very special'. It was somewhat reminiscent of the Medicine men of the American Plains of the last century who travelled from town to town in covered wagons selling their 'elixirs'. They sold their stock and moved out quietly overnight. In the European Union at the moment there is a trend to get some support from the Union for initiating new crops with financial help. However, this requires dedicated work by people who have the technical ability to bring the growers and their crops together for the next stage in their programme.

However, when oil is sometimes produced as for example Melissa Oil in Ireland (Whitehall Farm) and Wales (Clwydian Oils) over the past few years it has limited sales because it is expensive. Now there is the new development of English Oils by The English Camomile Company. In spite of the recent survey in Aromatherapy Quarterly about all aromatherapists only wanting 'pure oils' this has not borne out by companies in the Melissa oil business. The demand for essential oils is growing and demand usually exceeds supply. As the European Farming industry is collapsing in many countries, especially in Britain there is an enormous opportunity for farmers to look at essential oil plants as a viable alternative.

2. THE DISTILLATION OR EXTRACTION PROCESS.

The extraction of the oil or absolute from the parent plant can take several forms. It is often assumed that 'oils are steam distilled' and 'absolutes are solvent extracted'. This is an over simplification. There are many different methods of producing oils from the parent plant (or even part of the plant).

Original distillation methods go back many centuries to where the plant materials was treated with steam and the resultant vapour was cooled and collected and any oil skimmed or drawn off the top of the water. The original cucurbit and alembic of the Arabian chemists has come a long way in the past 1,000 years. In particular the last 100 years has seen a development towards more sophisticated methods to collect every drop of oil available. The 'oil' isolation techniques are quite extensive.

'EXTRACTION' METHODS.

1. Physical process - Cold Pressing.
2. Dry Empyreumatic Distillation.
3. Enzyme Release - Water Distillation.
4. Water Distillation - With or Without Cohobation. (recycling)
5. Steam and Water Distillation - With or Without Water Cohobation.
6. Steam Distillation - Batch or continuous.
7. Hydrodiffusion.
8. Aqueous Extraction - Spray drying.
9. Extraction Specific materials with Solvent Oleoresin.
10. Extraction With Non-polar Solvent- Concrete.
11. Extraction of Concrete with Ethanol - Absolute.
12. Liquid CO2 Extraction.
13. Extraction with Super Critical Fluids.
14. Process with Hydrocarbon solvent.

Whilst original field stills have almost disappeared, the stills for sandalwood and other wood oils tend to be very simple. Modern distilleries however are very high tech with sophisticated equipment. Every drop is extracted and most stills co-hobate - that is they recycle the water constantly. The notion that you can take away the water and sell it as 'floral water' is incorrect. The term 'hydrosol' has crept in recently and the use of this French word gives it a certain mystique and cachet. Sounds real. However, if the still is modern and you can visit several in Provence, Spain or even England, you will soon discover that modern stills nearly all cohobate (recycle) the water.

Most floral waters are made with concentrates and do not come from the stills.

The actual water from many stills can be pretty dirty and needs to be filtered anyway. Orange Flower Water and Rose water for foods and Pharmacies has been produced with concentrates this way for some 50 years or so. Of course it would be wrong to say that there are no natural floral or plant waters extracted from stills which do not cohobate. Many of these 'waters' are ideal living conditions for bacteria and usually have to be treated with biocides to prevent spoilage. Traders and companies have to state the origin of such materials under new EU regulations.

There are many oils which have either to be rectified, matured or standardised. Several oils contain elements that are either obnoxious or unpleasant (e.g. menthofuran in mint oils). Some oils need to have dangerous compounds removed - Bergaptene in Bergamot oil - hence the FCF type. As for oils being 'locked-up' in plants, waiting to be released, alas this is not so. Some oils (Birch and Wintergreen) do not exist in plants and are actually produced by enzyme activity.

This notion of oils locked up in plants has arisen over the years, and goes back to the days of the Alchemists (slide) when they thought that 'essential oils' were the 'quintessence of life'. Oils were obviously not the four elements water, air, earth and fire so the 'fifth element' (quintessence) was

invented to account for this phenomenon. It tends to go hand in hand with the idea that they have a life force. If you watch the plant material being comminuted (chopped up small) prior to distillation, it is difficult to entertain this notion. Vegetables and plants all have a similar cellular structure and often the oils are almost incidental. Their production and function even now is still not fully understood and it would be beyond the scope of this talk to develop this aspect.

3. THE TRADING CHAIN.

The trade in spices goes back centuries. The building of empires by the European powers were often dominated by the need to get spices for their newly emerging industries and populations. Until the beginning of the spice age food tended to be drab, flavoured only with salt and local herbs. The discovery of spices changed all that and there was a rush to buy and trade in these new commodities. Pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon and all the other spices produced a chain of supply which was invariably limited to countries with colonies overseas.

The supply chains have often built up over the last four centuries so that you often find that Britain and France are quite notable in this chain. Of course it has changed considerably over the post war period as other countries got involved and many countries wanted to deal direct with their ultimate customers.

Now the various chains are dominated by either traders who specialise in oils and spices amongst other products or by companies who need to buy direct to get economic prices. Sometimes, the oils or absolute is distilled locally. At other times the material may come onto the market from saw mills or other sources. Occasionally material is transported to Britain (e.g. Frankincense) to be distilled here.

Most oils are transported by air for obvious reasons. The shelf life is important and deliveries need to be quick. Transport by sea is only used for some oils and almost as expensive as air transport. It is important to mention that once the oil or absolute has been 'extracted' it is beginning to age. Even transporting oils can lead to problems. If you send Cedarwood oil by air the main components of cedrol and cedrene can separate out and do not easily coalesce again. In the last ten years the fragrance and flavour industry has seen massive changes in ownership of companies so that the well known names may no longer be locally owned.

4. THE OIL COMPANIES.

Oil companies are relatively unknown to aromatherapists. These are the companies who are engaged in trading essential oils, absolutes, oleo resins, aroma chemicals, perfume compounds and all manner of aromatic materials. Most of their customers are involved in Pharmaceuticals, Fragrances, Flavours and Aromatherapy. In addition there are a few very large companies who trade in spices, herbs and oils. These are the companies who are busy producing many of the well known fragrances and flavours and most have been around for a long time. In the UK, these companies are all members of the British Essential Oil Association. They monitor standards, legislation and know their products in great detail. They are also in close collaboration with the European Union which now sets all the legislation and standards in oils with regard to Names, Health and Safety, Hazards, First Aid Measures, Fire Fighting Measures, Accidental Release, Handling and Storage, Exposure Controls, Physical and Chemical Properties, Stability, Toxicological Information, Ecological Information, Transport Information and Regulatory Information. They invariably seek to buy the best quality of materials available for their customers. Collectively they are the repository of massive amounts of information which has been built up over the years. Most deal direct with specific growers and producers, trust being built up over many years.

These companies are used to trading in large quantities, usually from the source or origin of the oil. Their suppliers are usually the very large growers who can often supply tons of oil. Usually certain companies are linked to specific growers and this relationship is beneficial to both parties. The buyer represents reliable purchasing and the grower responds with growing oil plants for the

distillery. The relationship is based upon trust grown out of many years of trading. Many are specialist companies and may do their own distillation of materials, special distillations such as Carbon Dioxide Distillation. Special Mention should be made of the work of Oils Pioneer - David Moyler who has advanced the process greatly. This means that such oils as Jasmin oil are now available.

It is a common assumption the 'essential oils are expensive'. They are not. They are relatively cheap. If you doubt this then distill some of your own lavender, rosemary or camomile. It is fairly easy to make a simple still. Essential oils on the whole are relatively cheap although the rare florals are very dear simply because there is little oil available. In the jargon - the yields of florals are very low therefore this is reflected in the price.

The companies are mainly international, reflecting the trade in general. Their work covers the whole world and they are acutely aware of sudden problems or disasters which can reduce a crop and therefore an oil overnight. They have a measure of the market in all the producing countries and are aware of fluctuations which can occur. Most of these companies offer a wide range of materials and oils. One company alone may offer as many as 20 different Lavander oils. Another can perhaps offer 10 different Peppermint oils. The range is quite immense and requires a wide, careful understanding of the nature of oils to buy correctly. As a general rule they do not market either dangerous oils or oils which do not have any 'pedigree'. Oils which are not normally traded need to be viewed with caution and in certain circumstances with suspicion. **These are oils which keep appearing in the aromatherapy market place which are either untested, badly named or non-existent. 'Chemotypes' are a case in point.** You will not normally find these in the 'international trading catalogue'. The reason is fairly simple - It has become an aromatherapy hype to list these oils on a price list as though they are 'very special'. A few are popularised by people who are not in the main stream of the industry and are not aware of the structure of the oil industry. Aromatherapists need to be aware that these oils which may be recommended by a single person. Most have no history and none of them have been tested by international bodies for toxicity. As an aromatherapist or herbalist insurance is unlikely to cover them for using these 'oils' it is only common sense to be aware of possible consequences. Some of them do not appear to exist in the countries concerned.

5. THE AROMATHERAPY COMPANIES.

A unique and special feature of Aromatherapy is that there is a somewhat select band of companies who are dedicated to supplying oils to aromatherapists and others. This is because most of them started when the movement began and are well known names. Some specialised in supplying oils whilst others went on to develop schools and organisations of aromatherapists. The first oil company organisation to be set up was EOTA which was launched in 1987 with an ambitious programme culminating in its first year with AROMA 88, the first major conference in essential oils which was held at Reading University, UK. Many of the 'names' which appeared here are now on the international circuit. This is one of the principal Universities which specialise in Plant Science and essential oils.

As many of these companies developed they were faced with all the difficulties that newcomers find when sourcing oils. They had to learn about the idiosyncrasies of oils the hard way. Finding the supply chain, how to assess purity, how to deal with storing oils, information and knowledge of oils and so on. Their aim, contrary to what one or two critics may feel, was the struggle to buy the best quality oils available. However, it can be quite a long learning curve and most have a story to tell you of their early days.

The Aromark idea was born in these early days, but died quickly as many companies felt that it would lead to some kind of standardisation of oils. Growing companies found little time or inclination to collaborate. It regained the initiative in 1990 when the Natural Oils Research Association established it as a method of monitoring and testing essential oils, so that member companies could use the Mark for their oils. The testing of oil however can be an expensive process and small companies or even small buyers could not afford the process. However, testing

is by no means a universal method of assessing oil quality.

However, the logistics of policing such a mark has diminished its effectiveness and it remains to be seen how long it can operate under new legislation. One pioneering aspect was the notion of 'Batch Number' and 'Best Before Date'. which was established in 1990 with the co-operation of scientists from Reading University who worked hard to establish parameters of oil decay. It is generally thought that 'essential oils last a couple of years'. Not so, they vary considerably. The European Union set up legislation in 1997 which requires this information to be printed on oil supplies. Many supermarkets have yet to catch up with this.

Having been in at the start of the movement means that aromatherapy companies have invariably collected a great deal of information on the way. What differentiates these companies from other companies is the way in which they can supply information to therapists. Many will have an open door policy so that you can visit them and see their operation. Many have open days where you can see how their company works. **If their suppliers are hidden or you are not shown round, or worse - don't get through the front door, then forget the hype you are being presented with and go elsewhere.** It does not matter if they are small companies (everyone has to start small - indeed it can be a positive virtue and all the main companies started here), they invariably are enthusiastic about oils and therefore are always in the learning curve. Most of the companies are delighted to show you how they buy oils, how they test, and you can see how the supply chain works. After all, much of this information is in the public domain through trade journals and now - the Internet. This does not happen with 'supermarket' supplies or operations which tend to be more commercial. They also have other priorities. In Aromatherapy companies you can see the chain from oil producer to the company. They usually buy some oils direct and have long standing relationships with growers, suppliers or oil companies. They do not as a general rule produce their own oils as oils are produced throughout the world and it is simply not feasible.

Of course many Aromatherapy companies have built up close relationships with a few growers and this is a healthy relationship as they can interchange information which can benefit both parties. Another point to bear in mind is that Aromatherapy companies do not 'knock' other companies. This is regarded as heresy so that if you find a 'trader' saying everybody else is supplying rubbish, then hesitate and consider what has been said. Can it be justified or are you being led by svelte talk to get you to buy their oils or other services ? Prices are almost universal so that trading in oils is not the 'sweet smell of success' you sometimes see in the tabloid press. It is sheer hard work. It always pays to look around and see what is on offer from various companies. Each have a varied catalogue.

Every company usually has some specialist oils. They also have different information so that you can end up with quite a dossier on oils. If you find a price hike because it is 'special', 'organic' 'special odour' 'vibrant aroma' and the like - **pause and take a careful look.** Is there any form of analysis, checking, certificating (if so when and by whom). Is there printed information on the oils or just words ? Are they familiar with the many regulations and Legislation coming out of Europe ? At the present time, virtually all the Legislation which controls oils comes from Brussels and the European Union.

Universities are usually not specialised to do analysis as they often have a weak data base and it is often left to technicians or students who may fail to understand 'the peaks'. Lecturers at Universities are concerned principally with what oils will do in pharmacology or agriculture and normally do not do this routine work themselves. Independent analysis by experts in the supply trade means that you can be more confident of your oil. Of course testing may seem expensive, but if you are buying reasonable quantities it is worth the expense. The problem comes with small companies or aromatherapists who find that it is expensive to test a sample. However, many companies are now testing so that if you are buying reasonable amounts you can follow up your purchase with requests for detailed information.

Oils of course have their own particular characteristics and change from the moment that you buy them. Oxydisation or heat can destroy many of them. Information is usually available from

companies about this aspect of oils so that storage is important. Some companies care about quality so much that they cover their oils or absolutes with either Nitrogen or Argon to prevent destructive oxygen getting to them. This particularly affects Citrus oils and floral absolutes. Another thing to check is the Batch Number and 'Best Before' date. This is legally required for many oils with a limited shelf life. This information is now virtually on everything in the supermarket and is a useful guide when buying. It has come a long way since eggs were introduced with a 'best before date'.

Recently 'organic' oils have appeared on the market place. Some may be justified - many cannot. The question is one of definition and this is the difficult aspect. It is well known that many growers in some countries will ask you what you would like to see on the 'certificate'. More recently however, the French Government has been trying to simplify the many organisations which exist and bring them under one umbrella. This new certificating body is known as known as Ecocert. In Britain the only organic certification available is the Soil Association but this cannot apply to essential oils as it is based upon crop rotation. The definition adopted however is most important.

6. AROMATHERAPISTS, HOSPITALS, CLINICS, SCHOOLS, HEALTH SHOPS, SUPERMARKETS, THE PUBLIC.

Now we are at the end user of oils or absolutes. Even within the last year legislation has gripped the entire industry so that if you are in a Health Service situation, Clinics, Medical Practitioner or Pharmacist they you are required by law to have detailed information of the products you work with. These are usually in the form of Health and Safety Data Sheets and Technical Data Sheets. The former outlines the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive and much of the information requires detailed information on safety, toxicity, transport and many other features. The latter identifies the major compounds present in the oil. The former Sheets are obligatory according to E.U. Legislation 91/155/EEC, the latter Sheets are supplementary information and not legally required. Most companies can provide this information if you are buying 'commercial' quantities.

It may come as a surprise to some that many important aspects of data sheets are simply not known. It is likely to come as a surprise that some of the information is quite daunting. However, you have to remember that these sheets of information are designed primarily for an industry which will be buying drums of oil. As more information is usually required it is likely that these dossiers will increase over the years. It has been suggested by one group that Aromatherapists ought to have this information, but the problems of supplying information is enormous. If you got Health and Safety data Sheets for your average supermarket goods you would have to have a library resource in every store and every home.

The question which has been raised in the past by various people is the question of adulteration. It is always possible to add materials to oils and dilute them. This occurs with 'washing up liquids' and 'bleach' to some extent where the really cheap ones probably have a higher water content in their formulation. Everybody who does the washing-up is familiar with this. Oils however are somewhat different and it is possible to adulterate an oil with a solvent, yet the smell or aroma will hardly have have changed. One can only look carefully at what you buy. Every oil or absolute has its own odour, composition and special characteristics. If you test sandalwood oil on a smelling strip and the odour disappears after an hour, then you need to be cautious.

Most aromatherapy companies will always spend time studying oils and rarely buy before they have authenticated the supply. The danger for aromatherapists is when they have are buying oils where the prices are unrealistically high. If the price is too cheap, there may be a reason for this. It could be old stock, oil from an un-named source, a special promotion or even poor quality. The prices of oils are all fairly similar so that if a price is very much higher it should be justified by quality.

Ylang Ylang is a good example of an oil which has several different 'types'. Ylang Ylang 4 is fairly low on 'quality', Ylang 3 is regarded as 'finer' and Ylang 2 is better and more representative. many years ago it was decided to produce a pure distilled oil from start to finish and this was to be called

'Ylang Ylang oil complete. It was not popular, principally because perfumers formulated on the different grades. However, it is possible to buy Ylang 1 or even Ylang Extra or Extra Superior. All the grades are decided subjectively by the distiller at source. Price is not always a reliable guide for quality so therefore you have to evaluate other factors when you decide. As we tend to live in a world where price = quality, it is easy to believe that the dearer the oil, the better quality. Not so. All oils on the market are within a narrow price band, and if you are offered one at twice the price because it is 'very special import', question further. It could be a case of 'never mind the quality - feel the width'.

The problem for hospitals and other organisations is somewhat easier. They demand and require detailed information when they buy. They are expected to have Health and Safety Data Sheets and Technical data Sheets. This gives the Medical profession exact information as to the quality of the oil.

THE END USER.

This can be the Aromatherapist, Herbalist, Reflexologist, Physiotherapist and so on through the list of therapies. However, with the proliferation of aromatherapy it can be almost anyone who is interested, and currently this includes the general public.

Buying has several stages - Suppliers, Tutor or friends Recommendations, Advertising, Book References, Visiting shops, Reading and studying oils. As most aromatherapists come through courses they will have been introduced to oils as part of their course. It takes a long time to learn about 'the tools of the trade' and aromatherapy is no exception. If your course has been short - the knowledge will be short and it up to you to expand this by having a personal library on the subject. A personal library starts with just one book. After a while you will find that it does not give all the answer so you look for others and the constant search for detailed information is an ongoing learning curve.

'HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO BUY ?

1. EXAMINE CAREFULLY THE LITERATURE.
2. TRY TO CUT OUT ANY 'HYPE'.
- 3 COMPARE PRICES FOR THE SAME OIL.
4. VISIT YOUR SUPPLIER OR TALK TO SOMEBODY WHO HAS VISITED THEM.
5. FORM A JUDGEMENT. ARE THERE TESTS AND VALIDATION ? LOOK AT THE PRICE STRUCTURE. QUALITY EVALUATION. BE OBJECTIVE.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE ?

Some years ago an Australian Company set up their company as 'clinical' with white gowns, clinical surrounding and hygiene standards. They also made medicinal claims for their oils. This was regarded as a direct challenge to the Pharmaceutical Authorities and it was not long before they instituted proceedings and attacks on the company. The Pharmaceutical Act came into play and as a result many oils were declared as 'toxic' and should not be sold without a 'toxic' or worse - 'poison' on the bottle (Tea Tree) A similar state of affairs in Canada occurred and even in Britain a few years ago there was an attempt to place herbs and their by-products on some kind of register.

More recently Directives have listed many oils as 'Toxic', 'Harmful' and 'Irritant'. These oils are now in the current CHIP Regulations. 5 are listed as Toxic, 32 are listed as Harmful and 17 are listed as Irritant. Whilst some of the 'harmful' oils mentioned are not used by aromatherapists, many are regarded as most useful and include Tea Tree Oil.

During 1998 this was followed by R65 - perhaps one of the most contentious notions based upon limited evidence of terpenes as dangerous for inhaling. There was one case in Europe and possibly one case in Britain. The information was not circulated. Neither was it examined or verified. The Regulation states that 3 criteria are required to classify a substance under R65 in the EU. The first criteria is based upon oils which contain '10% or more of hydrocarbons' (Addendum to letter 557 from IFRA). This letter states that the other two criteria (viscosity and surface tension) are 'not available' which is not the case, as some companies give this information. 79 oils are listed in this classification. A further curious fact is that the original documents mention aspiration which implies breathing, but the resultant legislation states 'swallowing' which is a different physiological process. It is clear that this directive has enormous implications for end users who need to be aware of what is likely to happen to the labelling of oils in the near future.

BIOCIDES.

Even more recently (June 1998) the term 'biocide' has been introduced into the language of oils. This concept is even more devastating. One serious aspect of this legislation is that it has does not appear to have been either discussed or challenged and therefore as it is now in the public domain it is up to everyone with concern to investigate the evidence and form a judgement. Legislation which emanates from Brussels needs to be opposed when not based upon sound scientific evidence. It is virtually impossible to discern biocides in oils unless you know what to look for. Lack of any activity or response usually means that such legislation goes through without dissent. It should not be assumed that as these committees are composed of qualified people that they are experts in essential oils. It could also have serious implications for those industries involved in fragrances, flavours and pharmaceuticals. Many current 'OTC' (Over The Counter) medicines could come within the definition and could be withdrawn immediately the law takes effect. This coupled with other legislation means that Aromatherapists, Herbalists and other therapies are at serious risk and could be limited to a one-to-one relationship with control in other people's hands. It is quite likely that other legislation could follow once it is established and made public that oils are either harmful, irritant, toxic etc.

WHAT SHOULD AROMATHERAPISTS DO ?

1. AROMATHERAPISTS MUST UNITE - SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.
2. THEY SHOULD SET UP IMMEDIATELY ONE NATIONAL ORGANISATION - THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF AROMATHERAPY HAS BEEN SUGGESTED.
3. THIS COULD HAVE A MEMBERSHIP BASED UPON TRADITIONAL LINES OF STUDENT, ASSOCIATE, LICENTIATE, MEMBER, FELLOW.
4. STANDARDS MUST BE OBJECTIVE AND ASSESSED INDEPENDENTLY. TIME SPENT ON COURSES IS NO INDICATION OF KNOWLEDGE GAINED.
5. THE IFA AS THE ORIGINAL FOUNDER ORGANISATION COULD BE THE SPEARHEAD OF THIS MOVEMENT.
6. RECOGNITION SHOULD BE SOUGHT TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE. RECOGNITION BY APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES - BOTH NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY.
7. THE ORGANISATION SHOULD ESTABLISH IMMEDIATE RELATIONS WITH APPROPRIATE LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES.
8. AN IMMEDIATE STUDY OF ESSENTIAL OILS SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN WITH A VIEW TO ESTABLISHING A DATA BASE OF USE AND COLLATING THIS INFORMATION.
9. AN EMERGENCY MEETING SHOULD BE INSTITUTED EARLY IN 1999 TO DISCUSS THE IMPLICATIONS OF INCOMING LEGISLATION FROM EUROPE.

10. A POLICY OUGHT TO BE ADOPTED AT THIS MEETING WHICH SHOULD PROMULGATE A PROGRAMME OF ACTION AT ALL LEVELS OF INFLUENCE.

[Back to top](#)

Source and copyright:

<http://www.aromamedical.org>