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17-6-2025

Craft, care and circularity: Rethinking a just transition for hairdressing

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What’s to comb:

- Research context
- Chemicals use and disposal
- Key actions for a just transition

Personal context

Studies where CE intersects with labour practices

Industry report on hairdressing chemicals

(Rigg & Hodgson, 2023)

Literature review on CE in hairdressing

(Hodgson et al., 2024)

Case study on CE challenges in hairdressing

*(Hodgson et al., 2025)**

**publication pending*

Chemicals in hairdressing

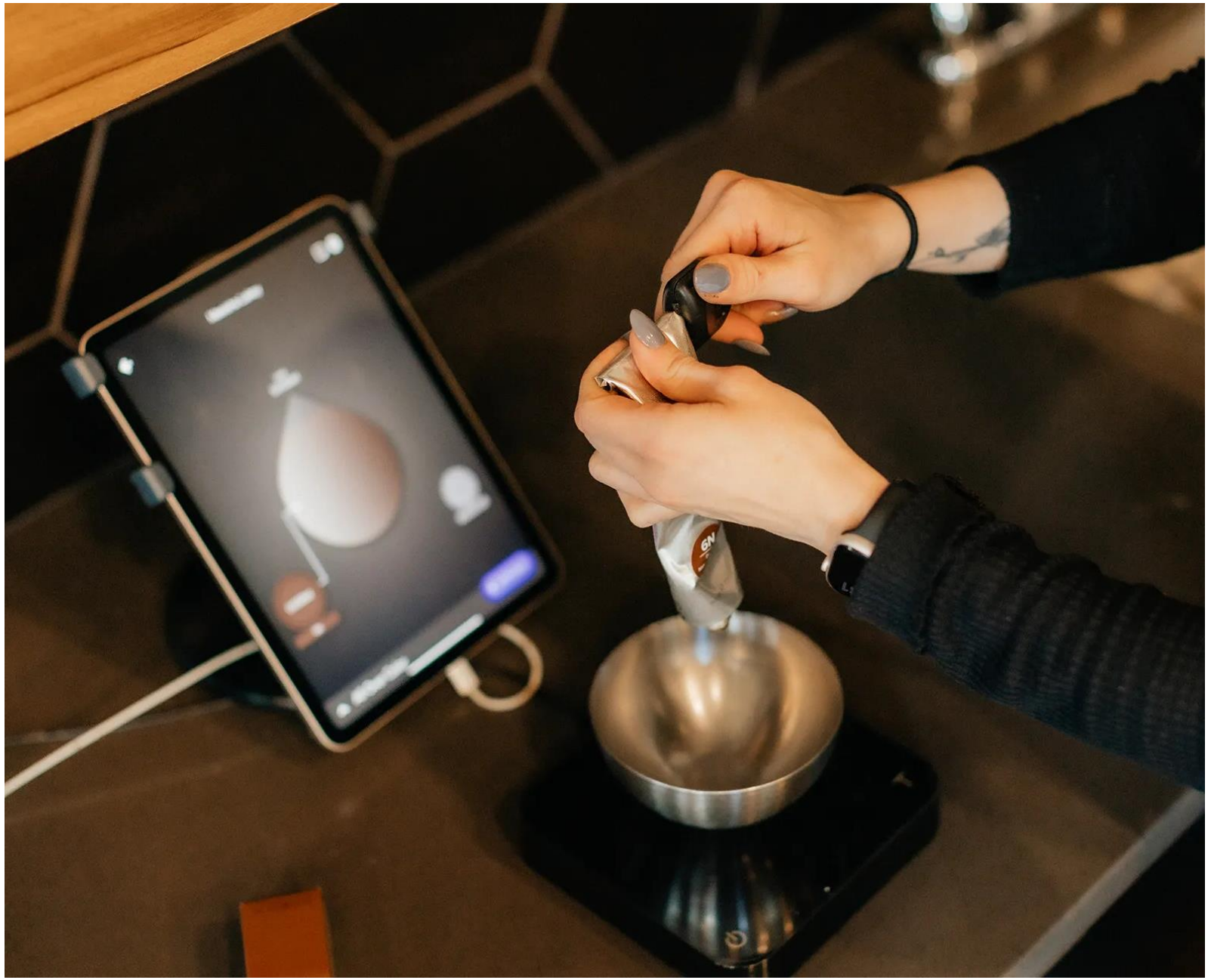
Hairdressing professionals regularly handle and dispose of toxic substances.

Exposure often leads to contact dermatitis and hand eczema.

(Seité et al., 2023; Quaade et al., 2021).

Alternatives exist but these are seen as less effective.

(Rigg & Hodgson, 2023)



Colour management systems

Salons reportedly waste 25% - 40% of hair color.

(Morris, 2022)

Colour management systems can reduce inventory purchases by up to 40%.

(SmartMix, 2025)

Supplier misalignment

Suppliers often require minimum order volumes and pressure salons to increase purchase orders.

“These big brands have got such a chokehold on us.”

(Hodgson et al., 2025)

Limited regulation around safe practices

Ongoing training on safe handling and disposal isn't required and many don't receive it.

64.4% of salons lack a COSHH register even though it is a legal requirement.

(Rigg & Hodgson, 2023)

Glove use to mitigate exposure to chemicals

Gloves protect against contact dermatitis BUT they are often disposable and non-recyclable.

Reusable gloves last for months BUT affect grip and technique.

Bio-based gloves can be composted BUT are flimsy and incompatible for colour work.

(Hodgson et al., 2025)

Salons within a larger social ecosystem

An unsafe working environment can burden the healthcare system.

(Driscoll et al., 2025)

Preventative measures in salons can prevent downstream waste and resource strain.

(Hodgson et al., 2024)

Salons within a larger economic ecosystem

Hairdressing is a ‘supplier-dominated service’ industry.

(Castellacci, 2018)

Salons are reliant on the market for access to safe, effective and affordable products/tools.

(Hodgson et al., 2025)

Regulation on disposal

Legal requirements exist but awareness is inconsistent and checks are rare.

50% of salons reported pouring excess colour or developer down the sink.

(Rigg & Hodgson, 2023)

Chemical recycling

Reliable data on chemical colour waste is scarce.

Waste to energy outperforms chemical recycling for colour waste.

(Rigg & Hodgson, 2023)

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Misalignment: Craft, care, circularity

Ongoing training to prevent harm

Mandatory, subsidised training on safe procedures is needed...beyond vocational education.

Mainstreaming of official guidance

Greater visibility of guidelines on chemical safety and integration into everyday practice are needed.

Clear industry signalling

Collective bargaining is an opportunity to coordinate and shift expectations upstream.

Policy to steer supplier reform

Policy must steer suppliers towards safe, circular and affordable options with professional use in mind and away from volume-based models.

Key actions for a just transition in hairdressing

- Mandatory, subsidised training on safe procedures is needed beyond vocational education.
- Greater visibility of guidelines on chemical safety and integration into everyday practice are needed.
- Collective bargaining is an opportunity to coordinate and shift expectations upstream.
- Policy must steer suppliers towards safe, circular and affordable options and away from volume-based models.

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shaping tomorrow

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