

Arts & Travel

Filmmaker starts chemical revolution

By RITA POLIAKOV
Staff Reporter

Andrew Nisker thinks your toothpaste may be killing you. Sort of.

Nisker, a documentary filmmaker, recently premiered *Chemical*, which explores how chemicals in household cleaners and hygiene products affect a person's quality of life.

While toothpaste may not lead to a slow, painful death,

Nisker's movie follows a family who have decided to live a chemical-free existence for three months. The Goode family purge themselves of all household cleaners and hygiene products, and start to make their own products, such as toothpaste.

"This is a point we make in our film. We don't need all of these things to clean. It's about how you clean, it's not about what you're cleaning with," Nisker said.

In his own home, the filmmaker uses vinegar, water and baking soda to clean, buys oatmeal soap and uses a crystal stone, a natural, mineral-based product, as a deodorant.

Through his movie, Nisker learned that chemicals are everywhere, from the formaldehyde preservative in baby shampoo to lead compounds in some lipsticks.

In the documentary, he also talks to a woman suffering from multiple chemical sensitivity, meaning she has a severe sensitivity to chemicals in products such as perfumes and gasoline.

"It's complete madness, what we're surrounded by," Nisker said about chemical-laden goods like air fresheners. "It may not be affecting you now, it may affect you in 15 to 20 years."

Before *Chemical*, Nisker made *Garbage! The Revolution Starts at Home*, for which he asked a family to keep all their garbage for three months and discusses the impact our waste has on the environment.

Nisker's interest in the environment started when he developed asthma as a kid.

"Through asthma, I became sensitive to the environment. I [asked], 'Why do my allergies bother me, why is the air quality bad?'" he said.

Nisker, who's head of Take Action Films, turned to filmmaking to answer these questions.

"Film is a very powerful tool," he said. "[I wanted] to use film in a positive manner, where I can use my skills as a researcher [and] inspire a larger audience."

The editing process for *Chemical* was about finding a balance, Nisker said.

"You want to tell the story in a way that's going to keep people entertained. We basically have an encyclopedia full of information, but we only have 75 minutes to tell our story," he said. "It's finding that balance between entertaining and story telling. That's kind of what we do in editing."

Nisker hopes his film will force viewers to pause before making their weekly purchases.

"I'm of the power to the people – that's my school of thought. You can go after governments and corporations and try to change the status quo, that's one model, that's going to take a long time. But you don't need to wait for that," he said.

"You can start right now by voting with your pocketbook, by supporting companies doing the right thing. Take power into your own hands and make your own products. That's kind of the next step."

For more information about *Chemical*, visit www.chemicalnation.com.



Andrew Nisker, right, poses with *Chemical's* associate producer, Bernice Kim, while making cosmetics.

Nisker uses his film, which premiered at the Whistler Film Festival, to raise awareness about the chemicals found in everyday products and their natural alternatives.

"I want a cleaner environment for my son, who's turning six... it's time for all of us to do our parts to be sure these chemicals are eliminated from [our] homes," he said. "The bubbly kids' toothpaste is fluorescent blue. Where do you think that colour comes from? It's all chemicals."

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