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The Sacramento Bee

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Oscar gifts

Statuettes won't be the only things handed out at Sunday's Academy Awards.

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SKIN DEEP

When it comes to
cosmetic ingredients,
buyer be aware

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We're pretty picky when it comes to what we eat and drink. We routinely scan boxes and bottles for evil ingredients such as trans fats or fructose.

And partially hydrogenated oil? Not in my snack chips, thank you.

But when it comes to our personal-care products and cosmetics – cleansers, toners, shower gels, shampoo, body lotion, eye shadow, sunscreen, foundation – we plunk down the cash (about \$35 billion a year) and then forget about it.

Moisturizers have earned our trust and loyalty more than milk. If they're sold in a drugstore or a department store – and all the better, endorsed by a gorgeous celebrity – they must be OK. Plus, we believe in the names – L'Oréal, Olay, Estée Lauder, Neutrogena.

Still, if we had to, could we decipher the labels that list ingredients? Get a load of some of these names: "tridecyl stearate," "triethanolamine" and "methylparaben."

What do they do? Why are they there?

Well, increasingly, there's a push to give users of the estimated 8 billion personal-care products and cosmetics in the United States the tools and the knowledge to learn.

From new state legislation to consumer-based Web sites, we're getting more and more ways to find out what is going on our bodies in addition to what's going in them.

While no one is saying that what we keep in our bathrooms is going to kill

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For tips on what consumers should know when choosing personal-care products and cosmetics, see Page E10.