

Ivory Soap—A Mistake?

Ivory soap is one of the few brands of bar soap that floats in water. If it floats in water, it must mean that it's less dense than water. When you broke the bar of soap into several pieces, no large pockets of air were discovered. Ivory soap floats because it has air pumped into it during the manufacturing process.

The air-filled soap was actually discovered by accident by an employee at Procter and Gamble. For four years, the company had been developing a formula for a high quality soap at an affordable price. Having perfected the formula, they began production of "White Soap" in 1878.

Several months later the accident occurred.

While mixing up a batch of "White Soap", the employee forgot to turn off his mixing machine before taking his lunch break. When he returned, he found that air had been worked into the mixture. He decided not to discard the batch of soap because of such a small error, and he poured the soap into the frames. The soap hardened and it was cut, packaged, and shipped.

A few weeks later, letters began arriving at Procter & Gamble asking for more of the soap that floated. The workman's error had turned into a selling point!

Harley Procter came up with the name Ivory while listening to a Bible reading at church one morning in 1879.

Ivory Soap is now over a hundred years old and still 99 44/100 percent pure. But best of all, it still floats!

If Ivory Soap is 99 44/100 percent pure, what's in it that is 56/100 percent impure?

And the answer is...

Uncombined alkali 0.11%

Carbonates 0.28%

Mineral matter 0.17%

Approximately 30 billion cakes of Ivory Soap have been manufactured

Some information obtained from the book "Mistakes that Worked" by Charlotte Foltz Jones.