

## How to read a cleaning/disinfecting product label



Many people mistakenly think that if a cleaning, sanitizing, or disinfecting product is sold to the public it has been shown to be safe by the government. However, cleaning products are not reviewed by the government for their effects on human health or the environment.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires that products labeled as sanitizers or disinfectants disclose the germs that the product label claims to kill, but the EPA does not evaluate all possible health risks to the users of these products.

### Consumers who want to purchase safer products have two choices:

- 1 They can buy a product that has been reviewed by a third party who certifies that it is safer.
  - Green Seal, UL 999/9997 and the EPA's Safer Choice Program all certify safer cleaning products (see Resources). Products that have been certified carry the certifying group's logo on the label.



- The EPA's Design for the Environment Safer Disinfectants Program is the only program that can legally certify disinfecting

products that are less hazardous for human health and the environment in the U.S. If you see the DE logo on an EPA-registered antimicrobial pesticide (bleach-based label), the product has met EPA's rules for safer disinfectants.

- 2 They can read a product's label and choose products that have safer ingredients.

When you read a label, keep in mind that:

- Many products claim they are "green" or environmentally friendly<sup>1</sup> but these terms have no legal meaning and are not a good reason to buy a product.
- There are no requirements for manufacturers to list ingredients for cleaning products. Disinfectants and sanitizers are only required to list the chemicals (the active ingredients) that kill germs and what germs they kill.
- When ingredients are listed on a product's label, they are not necessarily listed in order of how much of the ingredient the product contains.

Things to look for on a product label:

- Check for full disclosure of ingredients. Manufacturers who list all their ingredients on the label give you more power to make informed decisions.

**No list of ingredients** may mean that the product is safer overall. Antimicrobial pesticides are exempt from this rule. They instead list chemical groups in their ingredient ingredients. [Visit EPA's](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/label-ingredients) to download full ingredient disclosure guidance online at [www.epa.gov/pesticides/label-ingredients](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/label-ingredients).

