

Choosing safer products to clean and sanitize your home



Many common household cleaning products contain chemicals that can harm your body. Some of these chemicals can:

- ◆ cause or trigger asthma.
- ◆ cause cancer.
- ◆ irritate or chemically burn your lungs and skin.
- ◆ interfere with the functioning of your liver and other organs.
- ◆ affect your reproductive system.
- ◆ affect the health of unborn babies.

The risk of experiencing these health effects depends on:

- ◆ how hazardous the product is and how concentrated it is.
- ◆ how often the product is used.
- ◆ the amount that gets into your body.
- ◆ the age, health and gender of the person using the product.

What Can You Do?

Be a label reader. Begin by reading the labels of the products used regularly. **Manufacturers are not required to list ingredients on household products.** However, signal words (described below) and symbols or pictograms on the label can tell us how toxic a product is. The signal words for **cleaning** products are:

DANGER – tells us that the product is more hazardous.

WARNING – tells us that the product is less hazardous.

The signal words for **disinfectants** are: **CAUTION**, **WARNING** and **DANGER**. Look for a signal word of **CAUTION**.

Sometimes there is a symbol or pictogram on the label that gives us additional information.

Here is a pictogram that warns that a product contains a carcinogen (causes cancer) or a respiratory tract irritant.



Avoid the following:

- ◆ products packaged in aerosol containers.
 - ◇ Aerosol sprays create a fine mist that stays in the air and is able to go deeper into the lungs than the mist made by spray bottles that make a stream instead of a mist. This fine mist increases your exposure to the chemicals.
- ◆ products with added fragrances.
- ◆ products containing disinfectants (unless specifically used for disinfecting).



Avoid



Use third-party certified products

Shop for products in grocery and retail stores that fully disclose all ingredients and are:

- ◆ certified by a third-party certification organization (Design for the Environment Disinfectants Program (DfE), Safer Choice, Green Seal, or UL ECOLOGO®.)
- ◆ packaged in pump-spray bottles, not aerosol cans.
- ◆ packaged in recyclable containers.



Avoid products that list these ingredients:

- ◆ 2-butoxyethanol (or ethylene glycol monobutyl ether) and other glycol ethers
- ◆ Alkylphenol ethoxylates (some common ones are: nonylphenol and octylphenol ethoxylates, or octoxynols)
- ◆ Bisphenol A
- ◆ d-Limonene
- ◆ Dyes (may be listed as FD&C or D&C)
- ◆ Ethanolamines (common ones to look out for are: monoethanolamine [MEA], diethanolamine [DEA], and triethanolamine [TEA])
- ◆ Fragrances
- ◆ Parabens
- ◆ Phthalates
- ◆ Pine or citrus oil
- ◆ Quaternary ammonium compounds (look out for these: alkyl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride (ADBAC), benzalkonium chloride, dodecyl-dimethyl-benzyl ammonium chloride; lauryl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride; benzyl-C10-16-alkyldimethyl, chlorides; benzyl-C12-16-alkyldimethyl, chlorides; benzyl-C12-18-alkyldimethyl, chlorides; benzyl-C16-18-alkyldimethyl, chlorides; and didecyl and didecyl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride)
- ◆ Bleach or sodium hypochlorite

Resources

Look up your cleaning products on the following websites:

[UL ECOLOGO® Certification](#)

[EPA Design for the Environment Disinfectants Program](#)

[EPA Safer Choice](#)

[Green Seal](#)

Environmental Working Group's [Guide to Healthy Cleaning](#)

Women's Voices for the Earth – Information on what's in specific cleaning products and recipes for making your own less-toxic cleaner. [Available here.](#)