

The Dirt on Cleaners: Toxic Ingredients in Cleaning Products



Household chemicals are regulated in Canada

Household chemicals are regulated under Health Canada's Consumer Chemicals and Containers Regulations, 2001 (CCCR-2001).



Chemicals may make household cleaning easier, but not always safer.

Studies show that some chemical ingredients used in cleaning products increase the risk of long-term health problems, such as cancer and asthma, as well as short-term health problems, such as headaches and skin irritation. Chemicals that pose health risks are often considered toxic. Children exposed to toxic chemicals in household cleaning products may become more susceptible to cancers, later in life. This risk can be avoided or minimized as there are many inexpensive and non-toxic cleaning product alternatives.

This brochure will provide information about how Canada regulates household chemicals and which chemicals and cleaning products to avoid. It also contains simple recipes for non-toxic cleaning alternatives and additional resources to help answer questions you may have.

Some strengths of CCCR-2001

- * It requires hazard symbols and warnings on the labels of consumer chemical products;
- * It prohibits the sale of some very hazardous chemicals.

Some weaknesses of CCCR-2001

- * It does not require companies to list all ingredients;
- * It does not consider the risks, such as cancer, from long-term exposure to toxic chemicals;
- * It does not consider that combinations of some chemicals may be more toxic than each one separately.



Toxic chemicals are in cleaning products

Although not required, some companies may voluntarily list ingredients, but the list may not be complete. However, if there are hazard symbols on the package, there may be toxic chemicals in the cleaning product.

Watch out for:

Benzene, Toluene, Xylene, Methanol, and Ethylbenzene

What do they do?

They may damage the nervous system, fetuses and can cause cancer.

They are in:

Oven cleaners, disinfectants, detergents, toilet, tub and tile cleaners, metal polishes, drain openers, adhesives, paints and finishes.

Formaldehyde

What does it do?

It is known to cause cancer in people.

It is in:

Air fresheners, antibacterial dish detergents and carpet cleaners.



Toxic chemicals can go down the drain and come back through the tap

Remember that even if you are not directly exposed to the cleaning product, the chemicals that go down the drain, from the bathtub, sink, and washing machine, may come back to you in small traces in your drinking water. The water purification system is usually unable to remove all impurities.

Recipes for non-toxic household cleaners

There are many simple and inexpensive alternatives to avoid toxic chemicals in household cleaners. Try the following recipes:¹

1 Ellen Sandbeck, *Organic Housekeeping: In Which the Non-Toxic Avenger Shows You How to Improve Your Health and That of Your Family, While You Save Time, Money, and, Perhaps, Your Sanity* (New York: Scribner, 2006).

* WINDOW CLEANER

Use a 50/50 solution of white vinegar and water. The first time you wash windows using this solution, add a couple of drops of dish soap to get rid of the film left by earlier chemical cleaners.

* ALL-PURPOSE CLEANER

Use white vinegar or baking soda to clean toilets, sinks, floors and other surfaces.

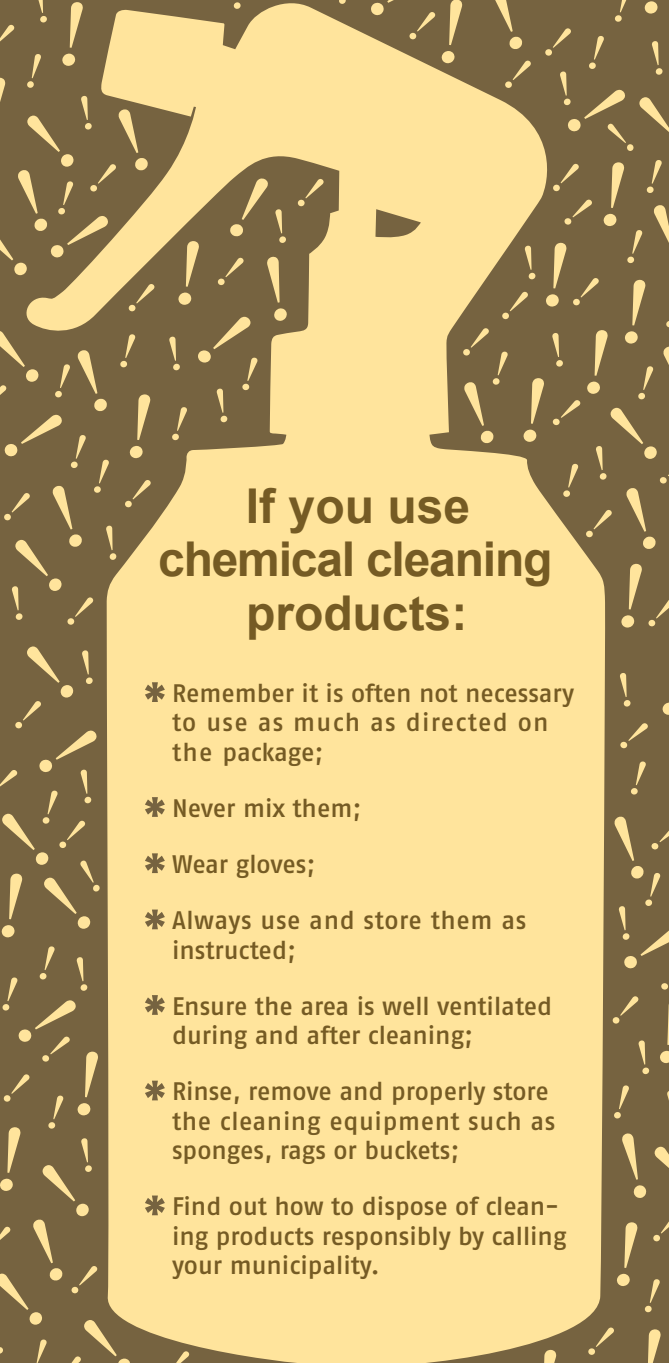
* LAUNDRY SOAP

Mix equal parts laundry borax and washing soda (sodium carbonate). Borax is available at most grocery stores. Borax should not be swallowed.



In general, you can use:

- * **LEMON JUICE**
Removes grease from mirrors and tables.
- * **WHITE VINEGAR**
Removes grease, prevents mould formation, cleans windows and floors.
- * **TABLE SALT**
Disinfects and scours.
- * **SODIUM BICARBONATE** (Baking Soda)
Scours, cleanses, deodorizes, removes spots, softens fabric and unclogs drains (mixed with vinegar).
- * **STORE BOUGHT PRODUCTS**
Biodegradable and environmentally friendly. Look for a certification logo.



If you use chemical cleaning products:

- * Remember it is often not necessary to use as much as directed on the package;
- * Never mix them;
- * Wear gloves;
- * Always use and store them as instructed;
- * Ensure the area is well ventilated during and after cleaning;
- * Rinse, remove and properly store the cleaning equipment such as sponges, rags or buckets;
- * Find out how to dispose of cleaning products responsibly by calling your municipality.

Take action!

Keep it simple at home

- * Phase out the use of chemical cleaners and try non-toxic alternatives.

Talk about toxic ingredients in household cleaners

- * To your friends, family, employer and colleagues;
- * To your local store owner or manager;
- * Call the telephone number often provided on packages to request a list of ingredients or to voice your concerns about products containing toxic chemicals.

Write to the government to urge:

- * The removal of cancer-causing chemicals from cleaning products;
- * Mandatory listing of all ingredients on cleaning products;
- * Warning labels if a cleaning product contains chemicals associated with cancer.
- * **Find your Member of Parliament online using your postal code at:**
www.parl.gc.ca
- * **To write Health Canada:**
Minister's Office – Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0K9
Minister_Ministre@hc-sc.gc.ca

More Resources:

Option Consommateur

Household Chemical Products:
A Spotless Record? (Pamphlet)
Tel.: (514) 598-7288, extension 227
2120 Sherbrooke Street, Office 604
Montreal, Quebec, H2K 1C3
www.option-consommateurs.org

The Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia

Guide to Less Toxic Products: www.lesstoxicguide.ca
Tel.: 1-800-449-1995
PO Box 31323, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3K 5Y5
www.environmentalhealth.ca

Labour Environmental Alliance Society

"Toxins Table" (leas.ca/Toxins-Table.htm)
Tel.: (604) 669-1921
1203-207 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, British Columbia, V6B 1H7
www.leas.ca



For more information visit:

The Health and Environment Awareness Project
Online: www.bcam.qc.ca/heap

Breast Cancer Action Montreal

www.bcam.qc.ca

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Montreal, Quebec, H4A 1G2

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The **Health and Environment Awareness Project** works to raise awareness about how pollution in our environment affects the risk for breast cancer and other health problems.

A Project of Breast Cancer Action Montreal and The McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women



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