

Welcome to the Tuesday Tree Huggin' Tip!

Tip 11: Make Sure Your Cleaning Products Are Green!

Levels of pollutants in indoor air, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, can be from 2-5 times to more than 100 times higher than outdoors, thanks in large part to toxic, irritating volatile organic chemicals, or VOCs, that evaporate, or "offgass" from home decorating and cleaning products. Step one for cleaners ought to be, open a window and let those pollutants out! Yet rather than letting in a crisp autumn morning breeze, many consumers stubbornly keep using synthetic room fresheners and fragranced cleaning products that are full of VOCs and other toxins. These can make our indoor air unhealthy, provoke allergic skin, eye and respiratory reactions and harm the natural environment, as well.^[1]

A Spanish study published in November, 2003, surveyed over 4000 women and found that twenty-five percent of asthma cases in the group were attributable to domestic cleaning work. And chemicals commonly found in cleaners include hormone disrupting alkylphenol ethoxylates and lung irritants butyl cellosolve, and ammonia, and the extremely corrosive sodium hydroxide (found in oven cleaners). Furthermore, in the U.S., store-bought cleaning products are not required to have ingredients listed on labels, so consumers need to search out those brands that do list them.^[2]

In 2000, cleaning products were responsible for nearly 10% of all toxic exposures reported to U.S. Poison Control Centers, accounting for over 206,000 calls, over half of which were about children under the age of six. According to Philip Dickey of the Washington Toxics Coalition, the most acutely, or immediately hazardous, dangerous cleaning products are corrosive drain cleaners, oven cleaners and acidic toilet bowl cleaners, and anything containing chlorine or ammonia.^[3]

What You Can Do:

- ★ Read the labels of all cleaning materials. Look for an alternative cleaner if the one you are using contains any of the following toxic chemicals:
 - Alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEs)
 - Ammonia
 - Triclosan
 - Butyl Cellosolve (aka butyl glycol, ethylene glycol monobutyl)
 - Chlorine Bleach (aka sodium hypochlorite)
 - Diethanolamine (DEA)
 - Phthalates
 - Phosphates
 - Sodium lauryl sulfate
 - Sodium hydroxide

^[1] <http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/98/clean> 9-2-08

^[2] <http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/ask/cleaners> 9-2-08

^[3] <http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/98/clean> 9-2-08

- ★ Choose products that are labeled "no solvents," "no phosphates," "biodegradable," and/or "plant-based."
- ★ Avoid products that have warning labels such as "Danger," "Warning," or "Caution" as these indicate that the product has some level of toxicity.
- ★ Use this handy tool from Consumer Reports to evaluate the cleaners you are using or considering using: <http://www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/> .

To Your Health!

Yours in crunchiness,

Angelique

Angelique Wheelock
Greening Program Coordinator
The Donaldson Group
15245 Shady Grove Road, Suite 160
Rockville, MD 20850
awheelock@thedonaldsongroup.com
<http://www.thedonaldsongroup.com>
Phone 301-251-8980, ext. 117
Fax 301-251-8940
