

[from Henry's/Wild Oats Markets newsletter: 5/14/08]

Greening Your Cleaning Products

With spring in the air, many of us are getting out our mops and buckets to begin that yearly chore of “spring cleaning.” However, while a good scrubbing of the home creates a healthy environment, it’s crucial to know how certain cleaning products can actually be harmful to your family’s health. It’s also equally important to explore safer, earth-friendly alternatives.

Cleaning often involves the use of potentially harmful products, which can be toxic, corrosive, irritating and flammable. Every time you use a cleaning product, you are absorbing its contents into your skin and breathing it into your lungs. Your kids and pets are also at risk as well.

What Are In Cleansers?

Phosphates – These can be found in dishwasher tablets. When they reach waterways, they cause algae to bloom. Algae consumes much of the oxygen and blocks the sunlight from reaching other aquatic organisms. As a result, the other organisms die from a lack of much needed nutrients.

Phthalates – These come from phthalic acid which is used to make dyes and perfumes. This chemical has been related to health effects such as organ system toxicity (non-reproductive), reproduction and fertility issues and birth and/or developmental effects. It can also harm the endocrine system, the brain, nervous system and even the immune system (including sensitization and allergies).

Washing liquids – These can be harmful because they contain ethoxylated alcohols, such as sodium laureth sulphate, which helps create foaming but is also a possible carcinogen.

Chlorine – A poisonous, greenish-yellow gas described as having a choking odor. Chlorine is a very corrosive and hazardous chemical used in bleaches. It creates toxins in waterways. It is crucial to never mix chlorine with other products such as ammonia, as this can create highly toxic fumes. It also creates organochlorines, compounds that pose an adverse human health risk. Some are even carcinogens. Exposure to chlorine gas can also produce chest pain, vomiting, coughing, difficulty breathing and/or excess fluid in the lungs. Exposure to 430 ppm in air for 30 minutes or more will cause death. People with previous lung disease, smokers and those with breathing problems are more sensitive to chlorine.

Floor polish/glass cleaners – Common chemicals found in these cleaners are ammonia and nitrobenzene. Such chemicals can cause respiratory problems and are skin and eye irritants. It is important to **never mix ammonia and bleach**. The combination of ammonia and bleach produces dangerous chlorine gas, which in

small doses can cause irritation to the eyes, skin and the respiratory tract. In large doses, it can kill.

Triclosan – Antimicrobial agent found in antibacterial household liquid hand soap, detergents and other sanitizing and cleansing products. The popularity of antibacterial consumer products has led to increased consumer use of triclosan. However, the American Medical Association has advanced an official **recommendation against using antibacterial products** in the home due to concerns about antimicrobial resistance. In addition, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) panel reviewed the existing research and found no evidence that households that use antibacterial products are healthier than households that use soap and water and other typical cleansing products.

Avoiding Toxic Chemicals

Any product carrying the words CAUTION, WARNING, DANGER or POISON is harmful to living things and should be avoided. It is very important to choose household products that do not contain hormone-disrupting chemicals that may hurt your health and the health of your family. You can try to avoid harsh chemicals in your cleaners by shopping at environmentally friendly stores such as Henry's Farmers Market, where natural, non-toxic household cleaning products are available to help reduce the level of toxicity and amount of household hazardous waste around your house. Unlike conventional household products, natural cleaning products are made with biodegradable materials and do not contain harmful chemicals. This makes them a better choice for you and your family.

Tips for Green Cleaning:

- Use alcohol as a sanitizer in place of "antibacterial" products.
- Pine oil or citrus-based solvents make great renewable resources, and they will not damage your lungs or cause cancer.
- There's finally a great use for full-fat mayonnaise: it's a wonderful furniture cleaner.
- Buy biodegradable sponges than can break down or be composted when their useful life is through.
- Indoor air is up to 90 percent more populated than outdoor air. Open your windows whenever possible.
- House plants are natural air fresheners!

In addition to non-toxic products, switch to hypoallergenic laundry detergents and fabric softeners, dishwashing liquid and household cleaners, as well as environmentally friendly paper towels and bath tissue. This spring, toss out the rubber gloves, and do your spring cleaning without harsh chemicals. There is no better time than now to shop for natural, earth-friendly cleaning products and start cleaning green in your home.