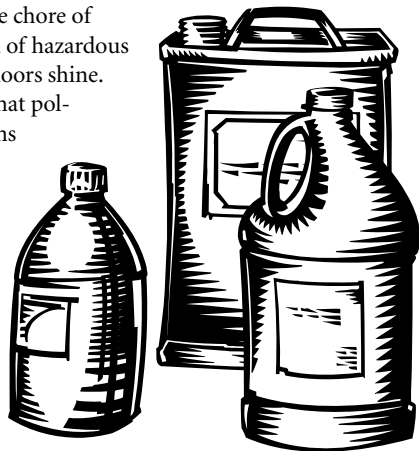


What's Behind the Shine?

Everyone likes a clean home, but few of us like the chore of cleaning. Even worse, we often rely on a cocktail of hazardous substances to make our bathrooms sparkle or our floors shine. Dishwashing detergents often contain phosphates that pollute the groundwater; wood polish generally contains flammable toxins like nitrobenzene; and laundry detergent may contain bleach and other corrosives. We lock these compounds away in closets or under the sink to keep them from our children—but we often don't consider what they may be doing to our own bodies.

Even as they help us pick up dirt and dust, many modern cleaners irritate our skin, eyes, and lungs. They can also leave toxic residues or pollute the water when we rinse them down the drain. But keeping our homes clean and avoiding toxic cleaners don't have to be mutually exclusive. Several companies now produce "green" cleaners that avoid ingredients that are toxic or don't biodegrade. Green cleaners can also be made from a range of safer substances we might already have around the house.



DID YOU KNOW...?

- * Cleaning products were responsible for nearly 10 percent of all toxic exposures reported to U.S. Poison Control Centers in 2000, accounting for 206,636 calls. Of these, nearly two-thirds involved children under six, who can swallow or spill cleaners stored or left open inside the home.
- * According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the air inside the typical home is on average 2-5 times more polluted than the air just outside—and in extreme cases 100 times more contaminated—largely because of household cleaners and pesticides.
- * The Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project reports that 6 out of every 100 janitors in Washington state have lost time from their jobs as a result of injuries linked to toxic cleaning products, particularly glass and toilet cleaners and degreasers.
- * In a 2002 U.S. Geological Survey study of contaminants in U.S. stream water, 69 percent of streams sampled contained persistent detergent metabolites, and 66 percent contained disinfectants.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

Get friends together for an Earth-friendly spring cleaning day. As part of this, replace your conventional cleaning products with items that are biodegradable and safe for children and pets. These products are available at natural foods stores, online, or through catalogues.

SUCCESS STORIES

- ❖ At least eleven U.S. states have banned phosphate from detergents sold within their borders, though the ingredient is still permitted in most of the country. Other states, cities, and counties have gone a step further by not just banning certain products, but also requiring the use of nonpolluting cleaners.
- ❖ In 1994, the city of Santa Monica, California, was able to replace traditional clean-

ers with less-toxic options in 15 of 17 product categories, saving 5 percent on annual costs and avoiding the purchase of 1.5 tons of hazardous materials per year.

❖ The U.S. market for natural household cleaning products has grown to \$100 million annually, according to natural goods retailer Seventh Generation. This represents just one percent of the total household cleaners market, but it's been growing by 18–25 percent each year for the last five years.



SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Stock up on a few safe, simple ingredients that can be used in most cleaning situations. Soap, water, baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, borax, and a coarse scrubbing sponge can take care of most household cleaning needs.
- ✓ Instead of using a standard drain cleaner, which likely contains lye, hydrochloric acid, and sulfuric acid, try pouring a quarter cup of baking soda down the clogged drain, followed by a half cup of vinegar. Close the drain tightly until fizzing stops, then flush with boiling water.
- ✓ For an effective glass cleaner, use a mixture of half white vinegar and half water.
- ✓ Baking soda and cornstarch are both good carpet deodorizers.
- ✓ To clean up mildew and mold, use a mixture of lemon juice or white vinegar and salt.
- ✓ A paste of baking soda, salt, and hot water makes a great oven cleaner.
- ✓ In the rare instance you need to use a hazardous product, use as little as possible and dispose of it in a way that will cause minimum harm—for example, by bringing it to a hazardous waste recycling or treatment center.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- 👉 **Environmental Home Center** (www.environmentalhomecenter.com) is an online source for green building supplies, including people-friendly cleaning supplies, non-toxic paint, natural carpets, sustainable wood products, and energy-efficient insulation.
- 👉 **Seventh Generation** (www.seventhgeneration.com), the leading seller of green cleaning products in North America, offers tips on green cleaning.
- 👉 **The Green Guide** (www.thegreenguide.com) provides consumers with practical, everyday household- and market-level actions that can yield system-wide environmental, health, and social change.
- 👉 **The Green Consumer**, by John Elkington, Julia Hailes, and Joel Makower (Penguin Books: 1988), contains useful advice on reducing the environmental impact of all aspects of home life and purchasing.