



**Ontario Home Economics Association**

*Ask a Professional Home Economist*

**For Immediate Release**

## **Cleaning Products - Is there a Safe Green?**

by Mary Carver, P.H.Ec.

Many consumers, activists and health professionals believe that danger lurks in our homes through toxic ingredients in chemical-laden cleaners. Some cancers, allergies, asthma, eye, nose, throat and skin irritations are feared to be a result of strong household and commercial cleaning products. Meanwhile consumers are demanding safe products that protect their health and the environment.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America claims that, '1 in 4 Americans is affected by asthma and allergies. Symptoms are often made worse by poor indoor air quality. Common asthma triggers include dust mites, mold, cockroaches, tobacco smoke, pollen, and pet dander. Household cleaning is proven to be beneficial in removing indoor allergens to minimize the triggers.' However, consumers must read labels and follow directions carefully. A little product may do the job - while a lot of product may trigger even more allergy symptoms.

'In response to their quest for safe, green and natural products, consumers are driving the cleaning product industry.' The number of green products available to consumers is growing. According to Terra Choice (guardians of EcoLogo® a third-party, eco-labeling program approved by the Global Eco-labelling Network), 'there are 73% more green products on the market today than there were in 2009. Consumers are demanding and achieving a greener retail market.'

A recent study on buying habits shows that 1 in 3 eco-consumers was 'not very' to 'not at all' confident about the validity of the natural food labeling claims. Do consumers also mistrust labels on cleaning products?

Skull and cross bones are difficult to miss on a label, yet, are we confident that we are getting a safe product when we pay a premium for a product labelled 'green'? Turns out - consumers are confused about the terms 'natural', 'safe' and 'green'. Cleaning products labelled 'natural' may still contain synthetic chemicals. It appears that the rush to meet consumer demand has led to a 'green-washing' label issue. 'False labelling increased dramatically over recent years but showed very slight improvement in 2010. Labels have been too vague, contain no proof of relevant green information, and contain fibs, misleading terms or dime-a-dozen thoughts that don't say much of anything,' according to Terra research.

A voluntary certification system for environmentally preferable products presents a simple message to consumers. **Consumers can be assured of safe green products by looking for the gold standard EcoLogo®.**



Industry Canada explains The Canadian EcoLogo® (also known as Environmental Choice) helps consumers to identify products and services that have been independently certified to meet strict environmental standards that reflect their entire life cycle - from manufacturing to disposal. EcoLogo® standards are designed so that only the top 20% of products available on the market can achieve certification. More than 7000 products - from paint to paper and cleaning products carry this logo.' <http://consumerhandbook.ca>

'EcoLogo® standards are especially stringent because they address multiple environmental attributes throughout the entire life cycle of the product or service. Perhaps even more encouraging is the fact that all EcoLogo® certified products must also meet performance requirements to ensure they perform as well as their conventional alternative.' While many products are certified, finding products on the store shelf with the EcoLogo® is another story. There is a list of products on-line that have earned the EcoLogo®. The certification applies to many types of goods - not just cleaning products, so the list is long. Check it out at: <http://www.ecologo.org/en/greenproducts>

It is believed that big box stores may stock more green products than boutique stores due to endless shelf space and national buying policies. Still it is not easy to shop green. Products are sold at premium prices to help manufacturers recover costs involved in the certification process. Fair enough. Consumers should pressure the government to drop the HST on EcoLogo® products to encourage their use. To pay the max-tax on EcoLogo® products is a double whammy for families and seniors trying to be green on a budget.

On Dec. 12, 2010, Parliament passed Bill C-36, *Canada Consumer Product Safety Act*. The new law will protect Canadians from unsafe products in the marketplace by giving government the power to order recall of identified unsafe products. Health Canada is currently finalizing the policies, operating procedures and protocols. Until implemented, it is too early to know how Bill C-36 will impact cleaning products.

Consumers want and need cleaning products that are effective, priced fairly, available in recyclable containers that are easy to open, easy to use and safe for their family, pets and the environment. No small order. Home Economists know about the diversified uses of baking soda, white vinegar, olive oil, lemon juice, hydrogen peroxide and borax for household cleaning. You can review tips on these products from Saskatchewan Home Economists at: [http://www.homefamily.net/index.php?/categories/consumersmarts/environmentally\\_friendly\\_cleaning\\_products/](http://www.homefamily.net/index.php?/categories/consumersmarts/environmentally_friendly_cleaning_products/)

#### **Quick Tips:**

- A spray pump filled with slightly diluted white vinegar works wonders on glass, mirrors, and taps;
- A baking soda paste for scrubbing tubs and sinks saves money and the environment;
- Pure soaps stand out as the best laundry choice as they are 100 % biodegradable and contain no phosphates;
- Hydrogen peroxide is widely revered by some people as the cleaner/disinfectant of choice;
- Using all household cleaners in moderation is the key to safety and economics;
- While it is important to disinfect kitchens and bathrooms, it is not necessary to 'disinfect' everything - especially walls, floors and surfaces with minimal hand contact;
- And old fashioned elbow grease is always a safe green.

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**Ontario Home Economics Association (OHEA)** a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life. **For further information, please contact:** Ontario Home Economics Association, 14 Totten Place, Woodstock, ON N4S 8G7 Tel/Fax: 519-290-1843 Email: [nancyohea@rogers.com](mailto:nancyohea@rogers.com)

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