



Ten Ways to Find Safer and Greener Cleaners*

Glowing Customer Endorsements or Pictures of Animals and the Use of the Color Green on a Label Does Not Mean That a Product Is Safe. Educate Yourself by Following These Ten Tips.		
1.	Look for cleaners that have credible third-party certification.	An example includes the Green Seal label (www.greenseal.org). The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) also provides environmentally preferable product information at www.epa.gov/oppt/epp/database.htm . If your store/supplier does not offer any of these products, ask the Manager when s/he intends to carry them. A letter signed by you and your neighbors/colleagues is a very effective way to elicit local support for the chemical companies trying to do the right thing.
2.	Find out if your state or region has a green procurement program (usually for government contract purposes).	Visit www.newdream.org/procure/products/approved.php for a list of approved products, including Massachusetts. Massachusetts also has an alternatives assessment laboratory as part of the Toxics Use Reduction Institute (www.turi.org) at UMass Lowell (www.uml.edu). Contact them at www.cleansolutions.org .
3.	Don't automatically disinfect when you clean.	Know when it is appropriate to disinfect and when it is not. This will help to decrease the overuse of <i>antimicrobial</i> ¹ products which may lead to the spread of 'super bugs.' Contact the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (www.apua.org) and the Center for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/op/cleaning.htm) for more information.
4.	Don't confuse fragrance with cleaning performance (dyes used for product identification should be safe, too, such as FD&C ²).	Some people are chemically sensitive to these kinds of ingredients. Fragrances can also be used to mask odors that may be associated with an unsafe ingredient. Use unscented products wherever possible.
5.	Be wary of salespeople who tell you that their product is safe when used as directed.	This may mean that the cleaner could be considered dangerous when stored or handled as a concentrate. Products need to remain safe under all kinds of conditions for everyone coming into contact with them, including pets and children.
6.	Reject cleaners that contain these chemicals.	Nonyl- and octyl-phenols are used to make alkylphenol ethoxylate (APE) detergents and are suspect hormone disrupters. In Europe, these products contain the slightly more expensive, but safer, alcohol ethoxylates instead.
7.	Look for labels that divulge ALL of the cleaner's chemicals.	These labels are similar to those used on food stuffs whose ingredients total 100%. While companies participating in valid green labeling initiatives report all of their ingredients, many smaller firms selling safe products do not have funds for certification. Reading labels thoroughly can reward these companies, too, with your business.
8.	Contact the manufacturer for the MSDS ³ on the cleaner(s) you are currently using.	Their contact information should be somewhere on the label. To date, workers (not consumers) have a right to this information. Alternatively, try http://hpd.nlm.nih.gov/index.htm by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
9.	Use only those cleaners containing an HMIS ⁴ and/or NFPA ⁵ numerical rating listed on MSDSs.	These ranking systems take into account a product's health, fire, reactivity and specific hazards, from a score of 0 (minimum) to 4 (severe) in each category. Displaying these values is not mandatory and constitutes a financial commitment for testing on the part of a chemical vendor to provide more data than just what is absolutely required by law. For bathroom, general purpose, glass and carpet cleaners, avoid any product with a score higher than 2 in any of the above categories.
10.	Stay away from cleaners that carry 'Danger' or 'Warning' statements.	Remember, as a guideline: 4 = Danger - May be fatal on short exposure. Specialized protective equipment required. 3 = Warning - Corrosive or toxic. Avoid skin contact or inhalation. 2 = Warning - May be harmful if inhaled or absorbed. 1 = Caution - May be irritating. 0 = No unusual hazard

¹An antimicrobial product contains chemical agent/s that are capable of destroying or inhibiting the growth of microorganisms. These can be dangerous pesticides.

²Approved for Food, Drug and Cosmetic use.

³Material Safety Data Sheet.

⁴Hazardous Materials Information System; ⁵National Fire Protection Association (www.nfpa.org).

*The majority of products certified as 'green' may be available for institutional purchase only. For more information on the technical aspects and environmental/health impacts of cleaners, degreasers, solvents and their components, including household products, contact TURI Lab Director, Dr. Carole LeBlanc at 978-934-3249 or Carole_LeBlanc@uml.edu.