

# Protect **KIDS** FROM **TOXINS**

## Tips for Non-Toxic\* Cleaning



Keeping your home clean reduces dust, dirt, and germs that can cause illness or trigger allergy and asthma attacks. But strong cleaning products can also cause health problems, especially for young children. Adults, especially young women and pregnant and nursing mothers, need to be careful around toxic chemicals, too.

Exposure to certain cleaning products has been linked to nausea; dizziness; headaches; allergic reactions; eye, skin, and respiratory tract irritations; and, in some cases of prolonged contact, cancer. Vapors from cleaning products can also trigger asthma attacks.

Follow these tips to have a clean home – safely.

### Read the Label

Look for the signal words **POISON**, **DANGER**, **WARNING** or **CAUTION** on product labels. Avoid products with the words **Danger** or **Poison** – these are the most hazardous. Those labeled **WARNING** or **CAUTION** pose a medium health hazard. Products with no signal

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\* The term “non-toxic” is not a regulated term. In fact, there is no product that is truly “non-toxic” – any chemical is toxic if you swallow enough of it. Here, we use non-toxic to mean the least harmful product, following the government standard for toxicity: a product is generally considered not toxic if the lethal dose is greater than 5 grams per kilogram of body weight, or around 2 ounces for a 25 pound child.

word are not considered hazardous by the federal government.

On most cleaning products, **WARNING** and **CAUTION** are used interchangeably. However, some cleaning products are registered as pesticides by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This includes commercial disinfectants. On these products, **WARNING** means the product is more toxic than **CAUTION**. To check if the product you are using is considered a pesticide, look on the label for an EPA number.



If you are not comfortable using a product that says “causes burns on contact,” “vapors harmful,” or “extremely flammable” – don’t! Buy another product or make your own cleaner from non-toxic ingredients (see back).

### Follow Safety Instructions

Read the label carefully and follow all safety instructions – for example, open a window and use a fan to pull the bad air outside; wear gloves; and wear goggles. Also check labels for warnings about mixing products together. You’ve probably heard that bleach and

ammonia should not be mixed because they form a highly irritating gas. Watch for other common household cleaners that contain chlorine bleach or ammonia. Chlorine bleach should also not be mixed with acid products such as toilet bowl cleaner or rust remover.

### **Avoid using Strong Solvents**

Solvents-based cleaners can be very dangerous, and will usually be labeled “DANGER. Harmful or fatal if swallowed.” Solvents may be found in products like oven, drain, and toilet bowl cleaners; furniture and metal polishes; spot removers; rug and upholstery cleaners; and dry cleaning fluids. Look for water-based cleaners that can do the same job.

### **Avoid Aerosols**

Aerosol spray products create a fine mist that is difficult to avoid, lingers in the air, and is absorbed quickly through the lungs. Instead, look for solid, pump, or liquid applications.

### **Store Cleaning Chemicals Safely**

Curious young children can easily mistake a cleaning product or medicine for juice, candy, or food. Make sure cleaners, medicines, pesticides, and other poisonous products are stored in their original, labeled containers. Store household chemical products out of the reach of children, in latched cupboards.

### **Green Cleaning Recipes**

Clean your home with nontoxic cleaners to have a healthy home. They are easy to make, smell good, cost less than commercial products, and don't pollute indoor air.

The three basic ingredients for many green cleaning tasks are baking soda (a mild abrasive for scrubbing), distilled white vinegar, and liquid castile soap. Castile soap is a vegetable-based, biodegradable soap available at health food stores as well as many drug stores and supermarkets.

Here are two popular green cleaning recipes.

#### Drain Cleaner

½ cup baking soda  
½ cup vinegar  
boiling water

Pour baking soda down the drain first, then vinegar. Let it fizz for a few seconds, then pour down a teakettle full of boiling water. Repeat if needed. Loosens minor clogs and helps prevent future clogs. Do not use after using a commercial drain cleaner! If clog is stubborn, use a plunger or mechanical snake.

#### All-Purpose Cleaner

1 ⅔ cup baking soda  
½ cup liquid castile soap  
½ cup water  
2 tablespoons vinegar  
16 oz bottle with flip-top cap

Mix baking soda and liquid soap with fork in bowl. Add water. Add vinegar last. Pour into squeeze bottle; label with ingredients. If too thick, add more water. Shake well. Squirt in tub, sink, toilet, counter, etc. Scrub and rinse.

### **For More Information**

For more green cleaning recipes and other information, or to receive this publication in another format, call Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, Environmental Health Division at 360-867-2674 (TDD line 360-867-2603) or visit our website at <http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehkids>

Green Seal for reports on cleaners:  
<http://www.greenseal.org/>

Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project,  
San Francisco Bay Area:  
<http://wsppn.org/Janitorial/jp4.cfm>

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