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## Household Products Start to Come Clean on Ingredients

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You can read a label to find out what's in your food. And a quick look inside a collar or hem tells you what your clothes are made of. Now, the same is happening with the stuff you use to clean your kitchen and bathroom.

A few manufacturers of household cleaning products have begun disclosing the chemicals in some of their products. S.C. Johnson & Son Inc. last month rolled out Web site [WhatsInsideSCJohnson.com](http://WhatsInsideSCJohnson.com) to describe most of the ingredients for its Windex, Glade, and Shout brands. Clorox Co. lists ingredients for its Formula 409 and other products at [TheCloroxCompany.com](http://TheCloroxCompany.com).

**Seventh Generation Inc.**, which has long disclosed most of the ingredients for its eco-friendly cleaning products, last year started explaining chemical names in terms that consumers can better understand on its labels. And Procter & Gamble Co. plans to list its ingredients online and describe them in consumer friendly terms.

These efforts are receiving a boost from industry trade groups that recently set up joint guidelines to encourage use of a standardized format for presenting the technical information. "Consumers want to know more to ensure the safety of their family," says a Procter & Gamble spokesman. "The industry is changing along with that."

Health and environmental groups are concerned that some chemicals in household cleaners could contribute to asthma or respiratory problems, especially if consumers aren't aware of their presence. The groups say they welcome the industry's plans to boost disclosure, but say the efforts don't go far enough. Rather than signing on to a voluntary initiative, these groups say companies should be required to participate. They say ingredients should be listed on product labels, rather than on Web sites, so they are available to consumers before purchase.

And, these groups say, not all chemicals are likely to be listed -- manufacturers, for instance, generally don't disclose ingredients in fragrances because these are considered trade secrets. "We are concerned no one knows what's in these products and that it's not very easy to find out," says Tom Neltner, chairman of the Sierra Club's Toxics Committee.

Federal law generally doesn't require manufacturers to disclose which chemicals are used in household cleaning products, though companies must include on labels any emergency warnings and instructions for first aid. For institutional cleaning products, companies are required to disclose certain chemicals that may be hazardous because professional cleaners are generally exposed to greater volumes of chemicals than the average household user. That information is contained in "material safety data sheets" posted on corporate Web sites.

A bill introduced in Congress last year would have required manufacturers to provide the Environmental Protection Agency with the data necessary to determine if a chemical is safe. It also would have given the agency more authority to restrict the use of chemicals that fail to meet its safety standards. Democratic Sen. Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey plans to introduce a similar bill in the coming weeks, a spokesman says.

"Every day, consumers rely on household products that contain thousands of chemicals," Sen. Lautenberg said in a statement. "We must ensure these chemicals are safe before they reach the market."

The developments come at a time when consumer demand for cleaning products marketed as eco-friendly is on the rise, partly because consumers assume green products are safer, according to a recent report by Mintel International, a market-research firm. The market for so-called green cleaning products grew to \$64.5 million last year from \$17.7 million in 2003, it said.

Lydia Chen Shah, a 29-year-old marketing communications manager in Glendora, Calif., says she has gravitated to cleaners that are marketed as green, such as products by **Seventh Generation** and Method. "I don't want to feel like as soon as I put some household cleaner on the surface I'm going to have to stay away from it for a while," says Ms. Shah, who has pets and says she worries about their safety.

Currently there is no federal standard regulating the terms green or natural as it applies to cleaning products. Environmental groups advise people to read the label to learn why a product is labeled as green.

Advocacy groups have pored through companies' material safety data sheets listing chemicals that may be hazardous to professional cleaners. They say further study is needed to explore possible health effects on consumers who use smaller amounts of these chemicals at home. "In some cleaning products there are ingredients that are known to be respiratory irritants or sensitizers," says Ted Schettler, science director of the nonprofit Science and Environmental Health Network.

One group, Women's Voices for the Earth, outlined its concerns about certain chemicals in its 2007 Household Hazards report. The report pulled together various studies that had found associations between chemicals in cleaning products and certain health effects -- such as occupational asthma in cleaning workers. While the scientific data cited in the report are inconclusive, the group says there is cause for concern, and further research should be done.

One chemical found in detergents and all-purpose cleaners is monoethanolamine. It is used in various products such as Mr. Clean Multi-Surfaces Antibacterial Cleaner, made by Procter & Gamble, and Clorox's Formula 409 All Purpose Cleaner, according to the material safety data sheets listed on the companies' Web sites.

Studies done in the 1990s link the chemical to occupational asthma in cleaning workers, according to the Women's Voices for the Earth report. But Clorox says its products are safe and points to an analysis published by the U.K.'s Health and Safety Executive in 1997 that concluded there wasn't enough evidence to classify the chemical as a respiratory sensitizer.

Clorox says not everything on its material safety data sheets is hazardous because "we err on disclosing anything that might be germane to anyone using the product," says Reza Rahaman, vice president of global stewardship for the company.

Procter & Gamble said in an email: "A number of leading scientific and regulatory bodies around the world have investigated and reviewed this material and its safety profile, and all resulting data supports the conclusion that MEA does not pose a health risk to workers when used and handled in accordance to the manufacturer's safety recommendations."

Doctors and advocacy groups are also concerned about glycol ethers, which have been linked to reduced fertility and low birth weight in mice, according to the Women's Voices for the Earth report. One chemical in this category, 2-butoxyethanol, is used in products like Sunshine Makers Inc.'s Simple Green All Purpose Cleaning Foam, according to its material safety data sheet.

Sunshine Makers says its products are safe. "Independent laboratory test data show that there was no reproductive toxicity associated with exposure to Simple Green," Carol Chapin, senior director of research and development, said in an email.

Since most of the studies that analyze the health effects of chemicals in cleaners focus on occupational use rather than household use, "the information isn't really applicable to consumers," says Brian Sansoni, spokesman for the Soap and Detergent Association, a trade group. "Workers tend to deal with larger quantities of the chemicals in question. Consumers are not going to come into contact with those kinds of volumes of ingredients."

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