

Green Cleaning Action Kit

Tools for changing the practices of
companies and the policies of government

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GENERAL TALKING POINTS ABOUT SAFE CLEANING PRODUCTS

Tens of thousands of chemicals are used in American industry, placed in products, and released to our environment, with virtually no information on the potential consequences for human health and little oversight by the government. No legal requirements exist for ingredient labeling on household products. Making your own cleaning products is the safest approach for keeping your home and family healthy until companies publicly disclose all of their ingredients.

What Are We Asking For?

- **Removal of toxic chemicals from household products**
It is the manufacturer's responsibility to prove a product is safe, not the consumer's. If there is doubt or valid concern about the health impacts of a chemical, the chemical should not be included in their product until proven safe.
- **Full disclosure of ingredients on the product label**
Consumers should be able to avoid chemicals they're worried about by looking at an ingredient listing on a product label, just as we are able to avoid certain ingredients in food products.
- **Phrases you can use:**
I encourage you to sponsor or support legislation that requires companies to prove that their products are safe before they are allowed on the market.

I urge you to take action to require companies to disclose all ingredients on the product label.

I recommend that my fellow community members stop buying common household cleaners until we know what chemicals are in them. Try making your own cleaning products with safe ingredients instead.

Points to Make

- **U.S. government's responsibility to hold manufacturers/companies accountable**
Parents are responsible for the safety of their children, but they need help on this matter. Parents aren't the ones who decide to put potentially toxic chemicals in household products, and they shouldn't have to worry about their children getting sick from cleaning products.

Individuals affected by conditions such as asthma or allergies often look to avoid substances that may trigger or exacerbate their symptoms.

Similarly, women who are pregnant, or trying to get pregnant, take extra precautions to avoid exposures that may impact the development of their child. Individuals with chemical sensitivities or various other diseases are also concerned about controlling their exposures to certain substances. Thus, it is the government's responsibility to hold companies accountable for informing these individuals of potentially harmful chemicals on the product label.

- **The product's label is the best place to provide ingredient information to consumers when and where they need it.**

The label is easily accessible by the customer when comparison shopping in the grocery store - whereas the manufacturer's website is not. Similarly, if a person has a reaction to a product - they can immediately identify possible trigger chemicals by checking the label of the product in their hands.

- **Precautionary Principle**

If consumers had a choice between using two similar products, one that had potentially toxic chemicals in it and one that didn't, most people would choose the non-toxic one. So from a precautionary standpoint, it makes sense to avoid chemicals until we understand them better.

Again, making your own cleaning products is the safest approach until the above goals are met. It's an easy safe, and economical way for us to be sure that the cleaning products we use are safe for our health.

- **Full ingredient labeling is current standard practice in the food and cosmetic industries - and does not scare away or confuse consumers.**

Asthma

- **Certain chemicals in common cleaning products have been associated with increased prevalence of asthma, exacerbations of asthma symptoms, and respiratory ailments.**

Asthma is a growing health condition in the United States, particularly among children, and cleaning product use has been shown to exacerbate or increase the incidence of asthma and respiratory effects in children.

The incidence of occupational asthma in cleaning workers provides cause for concern for household cleaning products.

Children are disproportionately impacted by cleaning chemicals, both at home and in school. Children are often more vulnerable to chemicals because their organs and immune systems are not fully developed.

- *Asthma is the most common serious chronic childhood disease, and is the third-ranking cause of hospitalization in children under age 15.*

Reproductive Harm

- **Certain chemicals used in common cleaning products have been associated with reproductive harm.**

These include alterations in sexual behavior, decreases in fertility, menstrual changes, changes in the onset of puberty, cancers of reproductive organs, miscarriage, premature birth and other effects.

Studies suggest using precaution may protect the next generation. Many scientists now believe that chemical exposure, even at very low levels, can have adverse impacts on the reproductive system. When a pregnant mother is exposed to chemicals, this exposure can also impact the developing child and lead to developmental effects, such as birth defects, low birth weight, impacts on cognitive development or other harmful outcomes.

- *Pregnant women exposed to glycol ethers (solvents commonly found in glass and all-purpose spray cleaners) in their work environments were significantly more likely to have children with birth defects, such as neural tube defects and cleft lip.*

Resources

- **Our claims are based on science**

It's good to remind people of that, so your letters, calls, and meetings have a solid grounding in scientific evidence. But be careful not to make up facts. Here are some great resources to get information, or to refer people:

- **Women's Voices for the Earth website**
www.womenandenvironment.org
- **Household Hazards report and Fact Sheets**
www.womenandenvironment.org/campaignsandprograms/SafeCleaning/ResourcesCleaning
- **WVE Safe Cleaning webpage**
www.womenandenvironment.org/campaignsandprograms/SafeCleaning/index.html

WRITING TO YOUR CONGRESSPERSON

What's the Best Method?

- **Email**

In today's technologically savvy world, sending an email may be a better choice than writing a letter. **But be sure to personalize your email**—pre-written bulk emails are common now, so the more personal you can be, the more likely you are to bring the issue to the congressperson's attention and receive a response. Follow up your email with a call to your legislator's office if you haven't received a response.

- **Old-Fashioned Mail**

A physical letter is also a good choice because it shows the most effort on your part, and therefore a high level of concern. Stacks of letters to a legislator highlight the importance of a single issue to their constituency.

How Do I Write It?

General outline for writing a letter to your congressperson: 1) Mention some key findings in linking certain chemicals to asthma and reproductive harm. 2) Explain what we're asking for: full disclosure of ingredients on the product label, and removal of chemicals from household cleaners until they can be proven safe. 3) Write about why this issue matters to you.

- **Write on a personal level**

You are writing this letter because health, safety, and the environment matters to you, so try to make that apparent. You can explain why you decided to host a Green Cleaning Party, or tell a story about how toxins have affected you, your friends, or your family. It's okay to use an informal tone in your letter if it helps you to get your point across. If you're using one of our sample letters, feel free to add some of your own words or change it to fit your experience.

- **Be brief**

Legislators and their staffers receive a lot of letters, so try to stick to one page!

- **Ask them to take action regarding toxic chemicals in your cleaning products**

If there is a specific bill in progress, mention it and ask your congressperson to support it. If not, suggest that they introduce legislation to regulate chemicals in household products.

- **Ask for a response**

This ensures that legislators are paying attention to your voice. Include your name and address in the letter, because envelopes are often thrown

away. If you haven't received a response, call your Congressperson's office to follow up.

- **Include printed materials on toxic chemicals**
Including recent and relevant news clippings from newspapers or magazines demonstrates that the issue is important to the public. Keep a watch for relevant news articles - check the "news" section on the WVE website for links to recent articles.

Where Do I Send It?

- Look up your Representative's contact information at www.house.gov
- Look up your Senator's contact information at www.senate.gov
- Call your local elections office for your congressperson's contact information

GENERAL SAMPLE LETTER TO SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE

(Your Senator/Representative's name)

(Office address - check www.house.gov or www.senate.gov)

Date

Dear Senator/Representative (last name),

I am writing to ask you to take action to hold cleaning companies accountable for potentially dangerous ingredients in their products. I recently read *Household Hazards*, a report by Women's Voices for the Earth that exposes the link between certain chemicals in common cleaning products and asthma and reproductive harm. For example, monoethanolamine (MEA) is found in some laundry detergents, and is known to induce occupational asthma. Glycol ethers, solvents commonly used in glass and all-purpose cleaners, have been linked to birth defects and fertility problems. In addition to these known possible effects, tens of thousands of chemicals are used in American industry, placed in products, and released to our environment with very little information on the potential consequences for human health.

I'm asking that the government require cleaning companies such as Proctor & Gamble, SC Johnson, Clorox, and others to remove toxic chemicals from their products until they can prove that these chemicals are safe. In addition, the government should require companies to inform consumers of potentially dangerous chemicals by disclosing all ingredients on the product label. The European Union has already worked to address this issue by enacting regulations that require companies to disclose all their ingredients to consumers on a website and ones that they've determined to be allergens on the product labels. The U.S. government should follow the E.U.'s path in taking steps to protect its citizens from potentially harmful chemicals.

I recently hosted a Green Cleaning Party through Women's Voices for the Earth to make my own cleaning supplies with non-toxic ingredients like vinegar and baking soda. At my party, we talked about the serious health concerns we had with using household cleaners. One study shows that women today are still doing over 70% of the housework in the average home, which puts women at increased risk for health hazards associated with chemicals found in common cleaners like Tide and Simple Green.

With labeling, I have access to the information I need to make informed choices about what I buy. I encourage you to introduce legislation to require companies to remove unsafe chemicals from their products, and to fully disclose ingredients on the product label.

I would appreciate a response to this letter, to let me know that you are paying attention to my concerns. Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Your name and address)

SAMPLE LETTER TO SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE FOR MOMS AND DADS

(Your Senator/Representative's name)

(Office address - check www.house.gov or www.senate.gov)

Date

Dear Senator/Representative (last name)

I've recently become a supporter of the Safe Cleaning Products Initiative launched by Women's Voices for the Earth. As a mother and your constituent, I'm asking you to take action now to hold cleaning companies accountable for potentially dangerous ingredients in their products.

Toxic chemicals in common cleaners are linked to asthma and reproductive harm. According to *Household Hazards* – a report that exposes the link between chemicals in household cleaners and serious health problems – children, pregnant women, and women who are trying to get pregnant are particularly vulnerable to these chemicals. When a pregnant mother is exposed to these, this exposure can also impact the developing child and lead to birth defects, low birth weight or other harmful outcomes. Certain chemicals used in other common cleaning products have also been associated with reproductive harm such as decreases in fertility, changes in the onset of puberty, cancers of reproductive organs, miscarriage, premature birth and other effects.

Currently, companies are not obligated to ensure that their products are safe and healthy before they're sold on the market, nor are they obligated to list ingredients on their product labels. This means that I am unable to make informed choices for my family and myself. It is my responsibility to look out for my children's safety, but I can't do this alone.

I'm urging the government to require companies like SC Johnson, Clorox, and Proctor & Gamble to remove toxic chemicals from their products until they can be proven to be safe, and require them to fully disclose ingredients on the product label. It should be the manufacturer's responsibility to inform us of ingredients on the label, so that we are free to avoid them the same way that we are free not to buy certain foods for health or allergy reasons.

I am taking action on my end by making my own safe cleaning products with safe ingredients like baking soda and vinegar. I recently hosted a Green Cleaning Party through Women's Voices for the Earth, and all of my participants agreed that until we can be assured that companies are held accountable for health, safety, and environmental issues, we will not buy another manufactured cleaning product. But again, we can't do this alone. I encourage you to address this issue by sponsoring or supporting legislation to require companies to remove unsafe chemicals from their products, and to fully disclose ingredients on the product label.

I would appreciate a response from you so that I can be sure these concerns are receiving the attention they need. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
(Your name and address)

CALLING YOUR CONGRESSPERSON

Where Do I Find the Number?

- You can find the number to your Congressperson's district office in your local phone book. To call their Washington DC office, dial the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Representative or Senator.

Don't Be Intimidated!

- It's unlikely that you'll get to speak directly to your Congressperson; you will probably talk to an aide in the office who will relay your request. You may have to leave a message, so be prepared for both situations.

What Do I Say?

- First, introduce yourself and say where you're from. If you'd like, you can mention that you're affiliated with Women's Voices for the Earth, or another local organization that you might be working with.
- State your concerns. You can refer to the call script below for ideas, or simply read it.
- If you're speaking to an aide, ask them what your legislator's position is on the disclosure of ingredients in consumer goods. If they don't know, ask them to call you back with that information; this draws more attention to our issue.
- Thank them for their time, and be sure to ask for a response from the Senator/Representative.

Call Script

"Hi. My name is *(your name)* and I'm a constituent of *(legislator's name)* from *(your city)*. I'm calling to urge the Senator/Representative to introduce or support legislation that requires companies to disclose ingredients on product labels. I also want the government to require proof that chemicals are safe BEFORE they are allowed on the market instead of testing them on consumers. I would appreciate a response from the Senator/Representative on this issue. Thank you."

CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE VISIT HOW-TO

Face-to-face, personal meetings are often more effective than just letters or phone calls. Your presence in your legislator's office shows a high level of concern. Set up a visit and bring a friend! The more people you have with you who are united on an issue, the more impact your visit will have.

Setting up a Meeting

- **Who and When to Call**

Look in your phonebook for the number to your congressperson's local office, or call your local elections office if you're not sure who your Representative or Senator is. If you want to go to the Washington DC office, call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

Ask to set up a date and time to meet with your legislator – **this often requires 6-8 weeks advance notice**. If a meeting is too hard to get, or you don't want to wait that long, ask to speak with an aide. The aide will take notes from the meeting and pass it along to the congressperson. Be sure to follow-up with the aide and ask them if they received a response from the congressperson.

Getting Prepared

- **Background**

It's often helpful to write out what you want to say ahead of time. See WVE's "General Talking Points" for a good place to start. You can also check out the WVE website. Here are some helpful links.

Safe Cleaning Products Initiative:

www.womenandenvironment.org/campaignsandprograms/SafeCleaning/index.html

Household Hazards report and fact sheets:

www.womenandenvironment.org/campaignsandprograms/SafeCleaning/ResourcesCleaning

- **Make It Personal**

Share a personal experience if you have one. Maybe you or your child has asthma and you're concerned about asthma attacks triggered by cleaners. These experiences are the ones that resonate most. If you don't have a personal story, share with the congressperson the reasons why you hosted a Green Cleaning Party.

At the Meeting

- **What to Say**

Ask for specific action from your legislator! Example: "I'm urging you to take action to require companies to disclose ingredients on their product labels," or "I encourage you to introduce legislation that requires companies to prove their products are safe before they can be sold on the market."

Explain why you are passionate about this issue and why your Congressperson should support your concerns.

Thank them for their time.

- **Leave Information with the Congressperson**

Bring some printed material to leave with the congressperson or aide. Feel free to use WVE's Congressional Information Packet. You can also look for a newspaper or magazine article about toxic chemicals in household cleaning products and bring that in.

You may have a 15-minute meeting or only 3 minutes. Be ready for both situations!

CONGRESSIONAL INFORMATION SHEET

Reason for Concern

Tens of thousands of chemicals are used in American industry, placed in products, and released to our environment, with virtually no information on the potential consequences for human health and little oversight by the government. No legal requirements exist for ingredient labeling on household products.

What the Science Shows, and Why It Matters

Research has linked cleaning chemicals such as monoethanolamine (MEA) and ammonium quaternary compounds (ingredients found in common household products) with asthma and reproductive harm.

Women and Reproductive Harm

Certain chemicals used in household cleaning products have been associated with reproductive harm such as decreases in fertility, menstrual changes, changes in the onset of puberty, cancers of the reproductive organs, miscarriage, premature birth, and other effects. When a pregnant mother is exposed to chemicals, this exposure can also impact the developing child and lead to developmental effects such as birth defects, low birth weight, impacts on cognitive development, or other harmful outcomes.

- While gender roles have changed culturally over time, women today are still doing over 70% of housework in the average home.
- Pregnant women exposed to certain chemicals in their work environments were significantly more likely to have children with birth defects.
- Nationally, over 1/3 of housekeeping cleaners are Latina women, while another 20% are African-American women.

Asthma

Certain chemicals in common cleaning products have been associated with increased prevalence of asthma, exacerbations of asthma symptoms, and respiratory ailments.

- The incidence of asthma is rising in the U.S. An estimated 20 million people, including 6.1 million children, have asthma.
- Asthma is the most common serious chronic childhood disease, and is the third-ranking cause of hospitalization in children under age 15.
- A January 2001 study published by the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* reported that janitorial workers have twice the rate of occupational asthma than other workers, clearly demonstrating a link between asthma and exposure to cleaning chemicals.

Current Regulatory Issues

- Agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) all of which have the expertise to regulate chemicals found in these products, lack the jurisdiction to do so.

- The Consumer Product Safety Commission, the agency with the most relevant jurisdiction over household cleaning products, has only 480 staff responsible for monitoring over 15,000 consumer products nationwide. As a result, they tend to limit their focus to acute hazards such as poisoning.
- Industrial products are required by OSHA to have a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) that lists ingredients and health hazards associated with a particular product, although MSDSs are often incomplete. No such requirement exists for household products.

What Can Our Congressional Representatives Do?

We are in need of a comprehensive policy that addresses the use of chemicals in consumer products in a consistent and accurate manner in order to protect citizen health and safety.

- **The U.S. government must enact legislation that requires manufacturers/companies to fully disclose all ingredients on the product label.**
- **The U.S. government must regulate chemical testing; manufacturers/companies must prove chemicals are safe before inclusion in consumer products.**

Once we know all of the ingredients that are included in consumer products, we can begin to evaluate toxic chemicals and their effects on human health. With a comprehensive policy on chemicals, we can begin to replace toxins with safe alternatives.

Contact Women's Voices for the Earth at (406) 543-3747, wve@womenandenvironment.org, or www.womenandenvironment.org for more information.

WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Writing a letter to the editor is a great way to make the public aware of an issue, and to share your opinion with a lot of people.

How Do I Submit a Letter?

- Check your local newspaper's Letters to the Editor policy, which is usually found under the Opinion section.
- Newspapers like to publish timely articles that respond to current events. Keep an eye out for articles on chemicals in household cleaning products, or related issues. Submit your letter on the same day or the day after the article runs, if you can.
- Don't worry if you don't see any articles! Submit your letter anyway.

What Should I Write?

General outline for writing a letter to the editor: 1) Mention some key findings in linking certain chemicals to asthma and reproductive harm. 2) Explain what we're asking for: full disclosure of ingredients on the product label, and removal of chemicals from household cleaners until they can be proven safe. 3) Write about why this issue matters to you.

- You can refer to our Talking Points and Sample Letter to the Editor for ideas, or you can just modify the sample to fit your situation.
- Keep it factual. If you aren't sure about something, don't write it, or check the WVE website at www.womenandenvironment.org for accurate information.
- Open your letter with a strong, to-the-point statement, like "I find it disconcerting that companies are not required to disclose the ingredients they use on the label of their household cleaning products."
- Close your letter with the thought that you want readers to remember, like "Don't buy cleaning products unless you know what's in them," or "Urge the government to require testing of chemicals before they are put into products to assure the health and safety of our families."
- Reread your letter for errors before you submit it, or ask someone else to read it for you.
- Keep your letter to 300 words or less
- Include your full name, address, and phone number.

GENERAL SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Your name

Your address

Your phone number

I am increasingly concerned by the fact that companies like Proctor & Gamble and SC Johnson are not required to disclose the ingredients of their household cleaners on the product label. These companies use chemicals such as monoethanolamine and ammonium quaternary compounds (found in common cleaners like Tide, Clorox, and Simple Green), that have been linked to asthma and reproductive harm. According to *Household Hazards*, a report by Women's Voices for the Earth that discusses the links between chemicals in common cleaners and serious health problems, there are very limited legal requirements for ingredient labeling on household cleaning products. This means that we can't make the choices to avoid certain ingredients that may trigger asthma attacks, allergic reactions, or more serious long-term effects such as fertility problems and birth defects.

Not only are these chemicals potentially hazardous to our health, they can be environmental hazards as well. A 2002 study by USGS showed that nearly 70% of streams of tested contained breakdown products of detergents, while 66% contained disinfectants. These chemicals are leaking into our water supply, and some have been found to reduce embryo survival in fish and alter tadpole development.

The European Union has already taken action on this issue by enacting regulations that require companies to disclose all their ingredients to consumers on a website and ones that they've determined to be allergens on the product labels. I urge the U.S. government to do the same, and to go a step further: companies should be required to prove that their products are safe BEFORE they can be sold on the market. Please call or write your Congressperson today to take action to protect your health and safety.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR FOR MOMS AND DADS

Your name

Your address

Your phone number

I want to express my growing concern that companies are allowed to put chemicals in cleaning products that may cause health problems, and they are not even required to tell us what is in them. I recently read a report called *Household Hazards*, and was appalled to learn that cleaners I use like Mr. Clean, Lysol and Simple Green contain chemicals that have been linked to birth defects, infertility, and asthma among other health problems. Studies have shown that pregnant women exposed to certain chemicals in their work environment were significantly more likely to have children with birth defects. Additionally, frequent use of certain chemicals both at home and in schools has been associated with increased likelihood of asthma in children. In fact, I learned that there are over 85,000 chemicals registered on the U.S. market, and only a small fraction of those have been tested for their long-term impact on human health.

I have a responsibility to keep my child safe, and I can't do that without information to make choices that will protect my family. . That's why I believe that companies need to list the ingredients they use on the product labels. Furthermore, the government needs to regulate potentially harmful chemicals by requiring that products are tested for their long-term health impacts. Until companies like Proctor & Gamble, Clorox, and SC Johnson can assure me that my child won't develop long-term health problems from their products, I plan to make my own with non-toxic ingredients like baking soda and vinegar. (You can find recipes at www.womenandenvironment.org) Finally, I urge our government representatives to introduce legislation to require companies to disclose the ingredients they use and to require testing to prove that chemicals are safe BEFORE allowing them on the market and into our homes.

CALLING COMPANIES

Call Script

"Hi. I just read a report about toxic chemicals in cleaning products that are linked to asthma and reproductive harm. As a consumer, I want (name of company or brand) to remove toxic chemicals that might cause health problems and to list all ingredients on the package labels."

Company Contact Information

THE CLOROX COMPANY
(Formula 409, SOS, Pine Sol, and more)
1.800.227.1860
www.clorox.com

SUNSHINE MAKERS, INC.
(Simple Green)
1.800.228.0709
www.simplegreen.com

RECKITT-BENCKISER
(Easy Off, Glass Plus, Lysol, and more)
1.800.228.4722

SC JOHNSON & SON
(Windex, Glade, Drano, and more)
1.800.494.4855
www.scjbrands.com

PROCTOR & GAMBLE
(Mr. Clean, Spic & Span, Tide, and more)
Each P&G brand has a different toll-free number. Check your product label for information.
www.pg.com