

# Hartford Courant.

Hartford, Conn.  
Friday, March 28, 2008

---

## Cleaning House the Green Way

*Women Learn How At Tupperware-Style Parties*

By JOANN KLIMKIEWICZ | Courant Staff Writer

By now, the green-living movement has trickled into just about every nook of the mainstream culture. It was only a matter of time then before eco-consciousness had its way, too, with Tupperware-style parties and their kitschy female bonding.

There's one difference — at these parties, no one is trying to sell anything. And instead of leaving with buyer's remorse, organizers say attendees are going home with important information that could help them create safer, healthier environments for them and their families.

Launched officially last week, Green Cleaning Parties are planned in more than 100 communities across the country, including Hartford, aiming to educate people about the toxins in common cleaning products and offer homemade alternatives composed of common pantry items such as olive oil, vinegar and baking soda.

"Unfortunately, we know that women still do a majority of the household cleaning," says Alexandra Gorman [Scranton](#), director of science and research for Women's Voices for the Earth, the national environmental group behind the cleaning parties.

In fact, about 70 percent of housework in the average home is done by women, with about 90 percent of maids and housekeepers being female, the organization reports.

"Yet we realized a lot of women never really thought about the chemicals that are in those cleaning products," says Scranton. "A lot of people are saying these [home-made mixtures] are the cleaners my grandmother used. They worked then, and it turns out they work now."

She said women need alternatives to chemicals that have been linked to asthma and reproductive and developmental health problems. While the effect of long-term exposure needs more research, the organization believes there is enough evidence for valid concern. It also aims to empower women to become advocates for more research and regulation of these chemicals, some of which aren't even listed on product labels.

"This is a tangible, and very easy place for people to start," says Imani Zito, a cleaning party hostess sponsoring an event next Friday at her Hartford shop and restaurant, the Green Vibration and Alchemy Juice Bar Cafe. She also writes a green-minded blog for mothers at [BusyMomsGoGreen.blogspot.com](#).

"We use these [household products] habitually. And we just want to get people thinking,

particularly here in Hartford, where we have a watershed issue, about what we're washing down our drains every single day," says Zito.

About 70 percent of streams tested nationwide in 2002 showed traces of detergents, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Two out of three streams had traces of disinfectants,

No comprehensive tests have been done of long-term exposure, but studies suggest there are risks to human health. A study by the American Journal of Industrial Medicine reported in 2001 that janitorial workers had twice the rate of occupational asthma of other workers. Other studies have showed exposure to common chemicals such as monoethanolamine, phthalates and glycol ethers may cause decreased fertility, miscarriages, premature births and cancers of the reproductive organs.

While environmentally conscious families may have turned to natural and organic products as the answer, a report released this month by the Organic Consumers Association showed even those contain toxins. Of 100 such shampoos, soaps and cleansers the advocacy group tested, 47 showed detectable levels of cancer-causing chemicals.

"It's a huge issue," says Zito. "And as consumers, we can take back our power by controlling our dollars and by making decisions about which companies we support."

Alchemy's cleaning party, at 203 [New Britain](#) Ave., begins at 6 p.m. on April 4. It will be followed by a 7:30 screening of "Blue Vinyl," a documentary about the chemical and plastics industry. For details, call the cafe at 860-246-5700, or visit [www.theGreenVibration.com](http://www.theGreenVibration.com).

To learn about the Green Cleaning project, visit [www.womenandenvironment.org](http://www.womenandenvironment.org).

Contact Joann Klimkiewicz at [jklimkiewicz@courant.com](mailto:jklimkiewicz@courant.com).