

Homes & Real estate

Originally published January 25, 2013 at 8:01 PM | Page modified January 28, 2013 at 11:39 AM

Keeping house clean doesn't have to be expensive

Follow these simple steps to reduce your chemical dependence and save money as you come clean.



By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

EcoConsumer

With all the fancy new products available, you could easily spend several hundred dollars a year on chemical-based products to clean your home.

Or you could spend closer to \$10 on those products all year and still have a clean house. Even better, you would lessen your environmental impact and make your home safer.

Follow these simple steps to reduce your chemical dependence and save money as you come clean.

Use it up

Household-cleaning products include spray cleaners for various surfaces, powder cleansers, cleaning wipes and toilet-bowl cleaners. They may not sound sexy, but the consumer-products industry keeps cranking out attractive new versions of these products, with special features and dazzling packaging. Many of us find it hard to resist these products and their promise of convenience.

But we often don't need them. Many of us already have a small chem lab at home, with 10 or 20 cleaning products under the sink and more in the basement.

So don't buy a new product if you already have an appropriate one for the job. This is a crucial step. By using up what you have, you might need to buy, for instance, only one spray cleaner and one powder cleanser all year.

Organize your cleaning products by type to see what you've got. If you know you won't use a product, ask if a friend or family member wants it. For example, you may not use oven cleaner anymore because you have a self-cleaning oven.

Resist the hype

Newer, more expensive products may not do the job any better. Don't buy products based on marketing claims alone. Read online reviews and get recommendations from friends.

As an example of the new generation of cleaning products, a major consumer-products company

offers a battery-powered “automatic shower cleaner” that hangs in your shower and sprays cleaning chemicals at the touch of a button. But it’s resource-intensive and costly, especially the refills, and has received decidedly mixed reviews.

Also keep in mind that stronger chemical-cleaning products, which may be labeled “heavy duty” or “2X,” often take a greater environmental toll. They might contain more chlorine bleach, for instance.

Especially now during flu season, marketers may use subtle scare tactics for products such as disinfecting cleaning wipes. Many health experts question the effectiveness and wisdom of extensively using disinfecting wipes at home to prevent the flu.

Question green labels

Hundreds of cleaning products are now marketed as green. Be skeptical. Don’t buy a product just because it makes a claim such as, “97 percent naturally derived.” That means very little and doesn’t justify the higher price.

Don’t purchase cleaning wipes with “Compostable” in their name thinking that you can put them in your yard-waste/food-waste cart for composting.

These wipes contain chemicals, and Cedar Grove, the composting company handling most of the Seattle area’s collected yard waste and food waste, does not want chemically treated paper in that cart.

Know your poisons

Try to avoid products with “Danger” or “Poison” on the label, especially if you have children. Be careful what you put down your drain, because if you get a clog, you might be tempted to use chemical-drain cleaners. Those are almost always in the “Danger” category.

Dispose of leftover toxic-cleaning products such as ammonia, chlorine bleach and oven cleaner at a household hazardous-waste-collection center or mobile-collection location. King County residents can call [206-296-4692](tel:206-296-4692) to find collection locations or to learn about alternatives to household-hazardous products, or search online for “King County household-hazardous waste.”

Concoct your own

One of the best ways to reduce your environmental impact and green your cleaning is to make cleaning products yourself. Dozens of Internet resources and books provide recipes, including Chelsea Green Publishing and Consumer Reports.

Three basic ingredients for making your own household cleaners are baking soda, white vinegar and a common liquid soap.

Cleaning will never be fun. But it doesn’t have to be so costly, and it doesn’t need to mess with Mother Nature.

Tom Watson is project manager for King County’s Recycling and Environmental Services. Reach him at tom.watson@kingcounty.gov, [206-296-4481](tel:206-296-4481) or www.KCecoconsumer.com. On Twitter: [@ecoconsumer](https://twitter.com/ecoconsumer)