

Keeping Toxins Out of Spring Cleaning (and Your Life)

Does the thought of spring cleaning make you feel a little sick to your stomach, or maybe develop a sudden headache? True, they could be signs of procrastination about the dreaded chore, but if you use commercial cleaning products, they can also be side effects of cleaning. The fact that these cleaners are commonplace does not mean they are harmless. Next time you're under the sink fishing out your cleaning supplies or in your garage ready to start another project, take a quick look to see what percentage of the products you use have warnings on the labels. Signal words such as "caution," "warning" (meaning one tablespoon of the product is harmful) and "danger" (signifying that a mere taste of the product could be deadly) are used to inform consumers that a product is harmful in some way.

Many of the cleaners we use on a daily basis have toxic side effects. The EPA warns indoor air pollution can be two-five times worse than outdoor air pollution due in part to toxic cleaners. Cleaning the counter with a chlorine bleach scrub? The next sandwich you make will be fortified with the tangy zip ... of bleach. Even dipping ungloved hands in a bucket of cleaning solution will result in our bodies absorbing chemicals. Reactions to toxic exposures can occur within a few minutes -- ranging from skin, eye, and throat irritations to nausea, dizziness, and headaches. Repeated exposure can result in lasting effects including cancer and other chronic illnesses. Check out the dirty scoop on common household cleaners at <http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov/index.htm>.

Toxic products can be a problem not only for those using them, but also for children and pets unknowingly coming into contact with them. We all know whatever's on the floor will find its way into baby's mouth, and residues of carpet cleaner or floor polish are no exception. Even worse, if Junior opens the cabinets under the sink, toxic products likely await. According to the home security company First Alert, household cleaning products are the number one cause of poisonings in children.

So what can we do? Avoid buying toxic and hazardous products as the first step. Look for plant-based, biodegradable products at your local grocery or natural foods store. If you can't find or make non-toxic substitutes for the particular chore, buy only what you need. If you have hazardous products to dispose of, make an appointment to properly dispose them on May 20th by calling 303-438-6336. Another option is to use the Boulder County Household Hazardous Waste Facility, available year round for no charge to Broomfield residents. For more information, call 303-441-4800.

Even better, we can learn a thing or two from past generations where clean homes were commonplace despite the absence of fast action fizzing cleaners and lemon-scented aerosols. For a fraction of the cost of commercial cleaners, you can make your own. Using simple ingredients like vinegar, lemon juice, baking soda, borax and soap, you can have a fresh, clean, and healthy home. Find non-toxic remedies for everything from oven cleaners and non-toxic pesticides to metal polishes and stain removers at www.ecocycle.org/hazwaste.

To learn how easy it is to make your own household cleaner with ingredients you likely already have at home, attend the Non-Toxic Housecleaning Workshop on Saturday, May 13 from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Eco-Cycle/Broomfield Recycling Center at 225 Commerce St. Bring an empty spray bottle and take some of this homemade cleaner with you. Participants will also walk away with a copy of Eco-Cycle's *A Safe Environment Begins at Home*, a guide book that contains recipes and ideas for non-toxic alternative products. If you plan to attend this free workshop, RSVP to 303-404-2839.

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