

## Are there laws that protect us?

Detergent ingredients are, among others, regulated in the European Detergents Regulation (EC) 648/2004 and the German Detergents and Cleaning Agents Act (WRMG). Substance groups such as preservatives, fragrances or surfactants must be declared on the packaging. Irritant or corrosive products must be labelled with hazard symbols (see below). Many substances of concern could be replaced but are still present in certain products. Therefore, pay attention to the label and use sparingly. Please note: regulations may differ between countries when it comes to detergents.

## Avoid irritation and allergies

Avoid products with allergenic preservatives and allergenic fragrances such as amyl cinnamal, hexyl cinnamaldehyde, linalool, benzyl alcohol, coumarin, benzyl benzoate, geraniol, eugenol in cleaning products and methyl heptene carbonate in detergents. Citronellol, limonene, citral and geraniol are typical components of citrus fragrances and are often

found in cleaning products. Ammonia, e.g. in glass cleaners, irritates the respiratory tract and mucous membranes. Disinfectants and bleaching agents such as sodium hypochlorite also cause irritation.

## How can this guide help?

WECF informs you about harmful chemicals in cleaning agents and related products and gives practical tips on how to avoid them.

WECF is committed to pollutant free products in politics and in production. Support us with a donation.

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## Would you like to know more?

[www.projectnesting.org](http://www.projectnesting.org), <https://www.wen.org.uk/our-work/greenbaby/>

## Get in touch with us

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## General tips

- You can clean your home with products such as a mild all purpose cleaner, and washing liq based on citric acid; its best if all are organically certified.
- Cleaning products should always be free of phosphates and solvents, disinfectants or bleaching agents and preservatives.
- Wear gloves when cleaning.
- The only environmentally friendly option is to use less detergent.
- Steer clear of nano cleaning agents; their health and environmental risks are still unclear.
- Avoid fragranced cleaning products. The smell does not contribute to the cleaning. Some fragrances can trigger allergies, irritate the respiratory system, and pollute the environment.

- Keep cleaning products out of children's reach, dont mix them and never put them into other bottles to avoid confusion. In emergencies, you find poison centre contacts online.
- Avoid products labelled "irritant" or "corrosive", recognisable by the following health hazard symbols:



- Use products with the following seals:



## Tip

Compare the information on the product with the hazardous ingredients in the table.

## Further links

[www.projectnesting.org](http://www.projectnesting.org)  
<https://www.wen.org.uk/our-work/greenbaby/www.oekotest.de> (German)  
[www.ecolabel.com/en/](http://www.ecolabel.com/en/)  
[www.test.de](http://www.test.de) (German)

## Apps

ToxFox  
CodeCheck  
Yuka

## Funded by



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	All-purpose	Laundry	Dishes	Bathroom, toilet	Floor, furniture	Room freshener
Disinfectant, Preservatives	Blue	Purple	Green	Teal	Orange	Pink
Solvents	Blue	Purple	Green	Teal	Orange	Pink
Fragrances, Stabilisers	Blue	Purple	Green	Teal	Orange	Pink
Surfactants	Blue	Purple	Green	Teal	Orange	Pink

## Hazardous chemicals

Disinfectant, Preservatives	<b>Formaldehyde</b>	<i>Carcinogenic, mutagenic, interferes with fertility</i>
	<b>tridosan</b>	<i>Very toxic to aquatic life, disrupts the endocrine system</i>
	<b>Sodium hypochlorite = sodium hypochlorite, also a bleaching agent</b>	<i>Corrosive to the skin, irritates the respiratory tract</i>
	<b>Isothiazolinones (CMIT, MIT, BIT, OIT)</b>	<i>Highly allergenic, can trigger contact allergies, irritant</i>
Solvents	<b>1,2-Dichlorobenzene</b>	<i>Very toxic to aquatic life</i>
	<b>2-methoxyethanol</b> <b>2-ethoxyethanol</b> <b>2-E thoxyethyl acetate</b>	<i>Impairs fertility, dangerous by inhalation, skin contact and ingestion and for the developing foetus</i>
	<b>Phthalates</b> DEHP, bis (2-ethylhexyl phthalate)	<i>Impairs fertility, dangerous for the developing foetus</i>
Fragrances, Stabilisers	<b>Musk compounds</b> Nitro / polycyclic compounds (galaxolides, tonalides) and 24 allergenic fragrances (see reverse)	<i>Disrupt the hormone system, trigger allergies</i>
	<b>Octyltetrasiloxanes</b>	<i>Disrupt the endocrine system and reproductive capacity</i>
Surfactants	<b>Quaternary ammonium compounds</b> Benzalkonium chloride, cetrimonium chloride, didecylmethylammonium chloride	<i>Promote the development of resistance</i>

## Possible health risks

## Protect children – avoid toxic chemicals

WECF Guide  
Updated edition



Household cleaning  
& Care products - Detergents

## All-purpose (cleaner)

The range of cleaning products on offer is large and confusing. Many contain harmful ingredients, such as endocrine disruptors, respiratory irritants, allergenic fragrances, and colourants. These do not contribute to cleaning performance. Disinfectants or antibacterial agents containing chlorine and formaldehyde are unnecessary in your home.



### Tips

- *Avoid special cleaners such as barbecue, cooker or silver cleaners.*
- *Ensure your product is free from special hazard warnings (pictograms).*

### Tips

- *Fabric softener, stain remover, sanitiser, prewash and 95° washing are generally unnecessary.*
- *Choose colour detergents as they do not contain bleach.*
- *Powder detergents contain fewer preservatives than liquid detergents.*
- *Remove stains with black or curd soap, white vinegar, lemon juice and warm water. Soak blood stains in cold water first.*
- *Use the correct amount of detergent in relation to water hardness (information from the water supplier), degree of soiling and load of the washing machine. This is good for the environment and your wallet.*

## Laundry

Detergents often contain environmentally harmful surfactants and allergenic fragrances. Optical brighteners do not break down in water and are sometimes toxic to aquatic life. Soapnuts, also in liquid form, are ecological, skin-friendly and, in some cases, fairly traded. There are different opinions about their washing performance.



## Dishes

Wash by hand or put everything in the dishwasher? A dishwasher generally delivers better results with significantly less water consumption and time. When washing by hand, the detergents are milder. They are similar in their composition, only the proportion of colourants and fragrances varies. Fragrances can trigger allergies and irritate the respiratory tract; there are also hand dishwashing detergents without fragrances.

### Tips

- *By hand: rinse as hot as possible, but not under running water. Soak any burnt-on residue first.*
- *By machine: Simple dishwasher tablets or powder plus rinse aid and softening salt are better than 3-in-1 products. Amounts can be adapted to the degree of water and food waste.*



## Bathroom & toilet

Sanitary cleaners range from harmless (i.e. without any danger signs) to corrosive, with some containing harmful disinfectants. Concentrated products can't replace good daily hygiene with milder, effective options like citric acid or vinegar.

### Tips

- *Prevent deposits by cleaning with a brush.*
- *Do not use "disinfectant" or "antibacterial" products. They are unnecessary.*
- *Toilet blocks and scented gels are unnecessary and contain substances that trigger contact allergies.*
- *Avoid sprays. The particles can be easily inhaled, irritate the lungs and pollute the environment.*



## Floor, carpet, furniture

Speciality products promise shine and care for this area. However, furniture polishes with petrochemical solvents are environmentally harmful and unnecessary.

### Tips

- *Use clear water for flooring such as linoleum, plastic, tiles, natural stone, plastic furniture and sealed wooden furniture, and use mild all-purpose cleaners sparingly for dirty areas.*
- *For cupboards, tables and other wooden furniture, a damp cloth is sufficient; for oiled and waxed wooden surfaces, use linseed oil varnish or beeswax balm occasionally.*
- *Stains on carpets or upholstery are best treated immediately and simply removed with vinegar water or a mild soap solution.*



## Room fresheners

Room sprays, incense sticks, air freshener paper, flower potpourris or scented candles can trigger allergies and breathing difficulties. This also applies to essential oils. Sprays and air fresheners release volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

### Tips

- *Open the window! Let bad air out. Fresh air is better than any artificial product.*
- *Allergy sufferers should also avoid essential oils.*



## Protect children – avoid toxic chemicals

### What is the problem?

Many chemicals in cleaning products pose a risk to health and the environment. They can be carcinogenic and corrosive, irritate the skin and respiratory tract and trigger allergies. Mixing certain cleaning agents can even produce dangerous gases.

### Why are children particularly at risk?

Children come into indirect contact with cleaning agents, e.g. when they touch cleaned surfaces, crawl over them, breathe in the vapours, put things in their mouths or through washed clothing. Studies show that many chemicals that are permitted and "safe" under EU law can be harmful to children; often, only the effects on adults has been tested. However, children are more sensitive to chemicals than adults. Due to their larger skin surface area in relation to their weight, higher respiratory rate and faster metabolism, they absorb more harmful substances. Their immune and nervous systems are still developing. Babies and small children excrete toxic substances more slowly, meaning they remain in the body longer and can cause damage. Hazardous substances can also be found in baby care products, toys, clothing, etc. Children are, therefore, exposed to a variety of harmful substances on a daily basis. It is particularly important to avoid harmful chemicals. Everyone should be careful when handling cleaning products, especially pregnant women. Harmful substances absorbed by the mother can pass directly to the child. Studies show that this can lead to health problems, even later in life.