



How do you know your cleaning products are green?

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It's a dilemma so many conscientious consumers face: You want to clean your home with the healthiest, nontoxic cleaners you can buy—and you're even willing to pay a little extra to keep nasty chemicals out of your home. But with so many labels claiming that cleaning products are green, how do you know you're spending your money wisely?

"Green" cleaning product sales quadrupled, from \$17.7 million in 2003 to \$64.5 million in 2008, according to [Green Cleaning for Health](#), a white paper released this week by [Air Quality Sciences](#) (AQS). By 2013, green cleaner sales are expected to reach \$623 million and account for 30 percent of the household cleaners market, compared with just 3 percent in 2008. Still, AQS reports, consumer awareness surrounding marketing claims for green cleaners is devastatingly low. "Many cleaning products lack substantiated green attributes, yet are alleged to be 'environmentally friendly,' or 'healthy,' causing confusion for consumers, facility managers, cleaning professionals—even manufacturers," says AQS vice president Tony Worthan.

Most consumers see "green cleaning" as a marketing buzzword, largely because no legal or regulatory definition of "green" or "green cleaning" exists, the report states. Consumers are also uncertain about whether or not green cleaning chemicals are safer and more effective than conventional cleaning products.

AQS conducted product emissions testing on conventional and green cleaning products for an Environmental Working Group study of cleaning supplies used in 13 California school districts. A room-size environmental chamber was cleaned twice, once with conventional and once with "green" floor cleaner, window cleaner and general-purpose cleaner. The green cleaners released fewer measurable air contaminants and lower levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Conventional general purpose cleaners released six times more VOCs than their green counterparts. The green general purpose cleaner released one-fifth (20 percent) as many contaminants as the conventional general purpose cleaner. Overall, certified green products emitted one-half (50 percent) as many contaminants as conventional cleaning supplies.

Still, some certified green products released measurable levels of substances that could pose a risk to children's health. When used

at full-strength, a well-known cleaner, which claims to be “non-toxic,” gave off 93 different air contaminants. One disinfectant powder cleanser emitted 146 distinct chemicals.

To truly know what you’re getting, the Consumer Products Specialties Association (CPSA) and the Sierra Club’s Toxic Committee recommend buying only from manufacturers that provide complete ingredient disclosure for their products. Currently, manufacturers are required to list only hazardous ingredients in their Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).

Another good strategy is to purchase only those products that carry a recognized, legitimate certification label—but be careful. According to a 2010 TerraChoice report, more than 32 percent of green products carry a fake green label, an increase from 26.8 percent in 2009. Legitimate third-party certifying bodies conduct data reviews, auditing, and/or laboratory testing of products in accordance with industry-independent standards. For many years, Green Seal—which bases its criteria primarily on minimizing VOC content—has been the most recognized and respected certification program for cleaning products. Green Seal now includes GREENGUARD’s certification criteria for industrial and institutional cleaners, based on VOC emissions rather than content. That’s good news, as VOC emissions are the primary culprit behind many health problems associated with cleaning products.

The report offers the following brief summary of the U.S. certification programs that directly address cleaning:



GREENGUARD : The GREENGUARD Certification Program is an industry-independent, third-party testing and certification program for products that emit low levels of VOCs, formaldehyde, aldehydes, respirable particles and other indoor air pollutants.



Green Seal : Green Seal is an independent, nonprofit organization that identifies and promotes products and services that cause less toxic pollution and waste, conserve resources and habitats, and minimize global warming and ozone depletion.



Design for the Environment: The US Environmental Protection Agency created the Design for the Environment (DfE) Program in 1992 to incorporate environmental considerations into decision-making processes. Manufacturers that meet the EPA's criteria for human and environmental health may place the DfE label on their products.

Green Cleaning for Health is available in its entirety, free of charge, from the Aerias-AQS Indoor Air Quality Resource Center at www.aerias.org. Read more by clicking on this [direct link](#).