WAGES' EFC Home Cleaning Product Screen

Use the following screen organized into four broad topics: value, company, health, and environment as a guide to select the best products for you, your family, and the environment. Next time you shop for home cleaning products opt for products that adhere to the highest number of criteria.

VALUE

Cleans effectively - The product cleans effectively when used according to the instructions; Refer to our Green Cleaning Tips for some of our favorite products.

Reasonably priced - The product's price is not excessive when value added and volume of use are factored in. For example, if the product can be diluted by adding water to the concentrate it can provide good value by helping you save money.

Multi-purpose - The product can be used for multiple purposes; It is more efficient to clean with two bottles, for example, than ten.

COMPANY

Socially-responsible company - The product is produced by a company that practices environmental sustainability and social justice, preferably with all of its products and practices.

Ingredients disclosed - The packaging or company's website lists all ingredients in the product. While this is not legally required this is a good sign and helps consumers avoid harmful chemicals. Refer to the list of Top 20 Chemicals to avoid.

Cradle-to-Grave life cycle analysis - The product has the least environmental impact throughout its life cycle (from resource extraction to final disposal.)

HEALTH

Not harmful to human health

- no carcinogens
- no endocrine disruptors
- no eye, skin, or respiratory irritants
- non-corrosive, non-flammable

No added dyes or fragrances

ENVIRONMENT

Not harmful to ecosystem health

does not harm aquatic life (no phosphates or phosphonates)
does not deplete ozone (no CFCs - Chlorofluorocarbons)
does not harm the atmosphere (no VOCs - Volatile Organic Compounds)
no NPEs - Nonylphenol Ethoxylates

Plant-based, renewable ingredients

The product is comprised of ingredients that can be replenished by natural processees at a rate that is faster than its rate of consumption and that can either biodegrade or reincorporate harmlessly into the ecosystem such as baking soda, borax and other products made from natural minerals. This does not include chemicals made from petroleum.

Biodegradable

The products lists "biodegradable" on the label or is certified by Green Seal. Biodegradable includes any cleaning product that is soap-based or made from natural plant or animal ingredients.

Not tested on animals

The product lists "No animal testing" and "No animal ingredients" on the label and has a seal of approval from an independent animal rights organization.

Water and energy efficient

The product is effective in cold water. These save the environmental cost of the energy used and pollution created to heat the water.

Minimal transport

The product is manufactured as locally as possible and requires minimal transport.

Minimal packaging

The product is available in bulk, available in concentrate, is in a recyclable package, and/or does not include disposables. Preferably the product includes all of these factors.

EFC Screen: FAQ

What does disposable mean?
"Disposable" means that something is designed to be used once or twice and then thrown away. It is better to use products that can be reused multiple times, such as cotton cleaning rags or mictro-fiber mops and cloths instead of paper towels, reusable mops instead of disposable mops, etc. This practice reduces waste as well as the resources used to manufacture products. All cleaning products certified by Green Seal do not have disposable components.

Are no-animal products better?
Products that are not tested on animals and do not include animal ingredients are not necessarily toxic for human use. However, these products protect animals from the pain of animal testing, and no animals are killed to make the product. The term "cruelty-free" is frequently used to indicate products that have not been tested on animals, but in practice the use of this term is inconsistent and can be misleading. There are products, for example, which call themselves "cruelty-free," yet they contain FD&C dyes from coal tar that in the past have been tested on animals and found to be carcinogenic.

What should I consider when evaluating a products packaging?
Each layer of packaging is really a separate product itself, and needs to be evaluated through the same complete life cycle as the product. When there are several parts to a package each part of the package needs a separate life cycle assessment. Our recommendation is adopted from model legislation by The Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG), developed to dramatically reduce the amount of packaging entering the solid waste stream. Designed to promote efficient solid waste reduction reuse and recycling programs, the packaging waste reduction model established the hierarchy of preferred packaging guidelines that we recommend. The best packaging materials are glass, paper and paperboard, steel, aluminum, wood and packages made of two or more of these components. Most cleaning products come in either plastic bottles that can be recycled, or paperboard boxes that are made with recycled material.

Why do Phosphates matter?
Phosphates and phosphonates are widely used in detergents and are very harmful to aquatic life. Phosphorus, a chemical element found in many minerals, is one of the key nutritional elements required by the cells of all living things. It is so vital to life that plant growth is limited by the amount of phosphorus available. It is a chemical element found in many minerals; the bones, the brain, and the nerves. When phosphorus is combined with oxygen, phosphate is produced. Although phosphorus is necessary for plant growth, too much can destroy aquatic systems. When there are unattached or "free" particles of phosphate, in the form of inorganic phosphates, these particles are rapidly taken up by the algae and other aquatic plants. Since algae normally require such a small amount of phosphorus any excess phosphorus causes an over extensive algal bloom and accelerated growth of other plants, resulting in depleted oxygen levels. Lack of oxygen in the water causes the death of fish and other aquatic organisms. In the past, phosphorus levels in water rose to such high levels from detergent in runoff, that many waterways were threatened. Since phosphates have been removed from most detergents, the situation has improved. It is likely that today's commercial products do not contain phosphates, but check for this on the label. All cleaning products certified by Green Seal have been certified safe for aquatic life.