

EarthTalk™

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The most offensive common ingredients, according to a 2006 study by the University of California Berkeley and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, are ethylene-based glycol, used commonly as a water-soluble solvent in cleaning agents and classified as a hazardous air pollutant by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and terpenes, a class of chemicals found in lemon, pine and orange oils that can morph into carcinogenic compounds when they mix with ground-level ozone.

Also, chlorine, often labeled as "sodium hypochlorite" or "hypochlorite," is almost ubiquitous in household cleaners, unfortunately for the inhabitants of many homes. Breathing in its fumes can irritate the lungs, and as such poses a serious health risk to those with pre-existing heart or respiratory problems.

According to the non-profit Cancer Prevention Coalition, some other problematic chemicals found in many household cleaners include crystalline silica, an irritant to the eyes and lungs and a likely carcinogen, and butyl cellosolve, which has been linked to kidney and liver problems and is reportedly toxic to

forming cells. The group lists dozens of other potentially dangerous ingredients in household products on the "Hazardous Ingredients in Household Products" PDF available for free on its website.

Gaiam, a leading purveyor of green household and lifestyle items, reports that the average American household contains between three and 25 gallons of toxic materials, mostly in the form of household cleaners filled with petrochemical solvents designed to dissolve dirt.

The company bemoans the fact that no law requires cleaning products manufacturers to list ingredients on their labels or to test their products for safety, leaving it up to consumers to make sure their homes are not only clean, but also non-toxic.

Luckily there are plenty of "greener" alternatives now widely available from manufacturers like Gaiam, Earth Friendly Products, Citra-Solv, Ecover, Mrs. Meyers, Sun and Earth, SimpleGreen, Method, and Seventh Generation, among many others. Even big players are getting in on the act. Clorox recently released a new line of home cleaning products under the Green Works label to attract a greening clientele.

For those so inclined, making your own green cleaning solutions is easy

and cheap. According to *The Green Guide*, consumers can "circumvent the armada of commercial cleaners" by keeping handy an ample supply of eight ingredients for nearly every do-it-yourself cleaning job: baking soda, borax, distilled white vinegar, hydrogen peroxide, lemons, olive oil, vegetable-based (liquid castile) soap, and washing soda.

CONTACTS: Cancer Prevention Coalition, www.preventcancer.com; Gaiam, www.gaiam.com; Earth Friendly Products, www.ecos.com; Citra-Solv www.citrasolv.com; Ecover, www.ecover.com; Clorox Green Works, www.greenworkscleaners.com; Mrs. Meyers, www.mrsmeyers.com; Sun and Earth, www.sunandearth.com; Seventh Generation, www.seventhgeneration.com; SimpleGreen, www.simplegreen.com; Method Green Home Care Products, www.methodhome.com.

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Many household cleaners contain potentially dangerous ingredients. But there's no need to panic: Many safer and greener alternatives are now available from Earth-friendly manufacturers. (Photo courtesy of Getty Images)

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