

Cleaning Products and Health

Housekeeping staff and janitors are required to use cleaning products as a part of their work tasks to ensure cleaning and sanitation of workplaces. Some of these products can be hazardous, even more so if not properly handled or used without training.

Cleaning products can be hazardous when...

- They contain disinfectants and other hazardous ingredients
- They are mixed
- They are not handled properly
- There is poor ventilation in the working area
- There is lack of use of adequate personal protective protection
- Workers are not properly trained to use the chemicals
- Chemicals are applied either by spraying or creating a mist.

UNSAFE EXPOSURE TO CLEANING PRODUCTS CAN CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS

Exposure to chemicals through the air

Several products used and substances found in buildings can irritate the respiratory system. Symptoms may include:



Breathing Problems

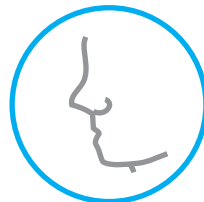
Shortness of breath
Coughing
Wheezing

Chest tightness, pain, or pressure



Irritation

Red, itchy, or burning eyes
Sore throat



Sensitivity

Headaches
Dizziness
Nosebleeds

People suffering from work-related respiratory conditions often do not realize their symptoms are related to their job.

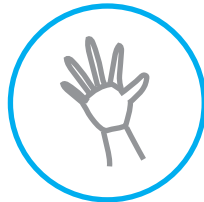
In work-related conditions, symptoms may...

- be worse during the work day
- decrease when away from work
- begin after starting a new job
- start or get worse as an adult

Skin contact

Direct contact with cleaning chemicals can cause:

- Drying of the skin
- Pain
- Itching
- Redness
- Swelling
- Burning sensation



Common skin irritants in cleaning products:

Ammonia	Phenol
Chloride	Sodium Bisulfate
Hydrochloric acid	Sodium Hypochlorate
Petroleum solvents	Sodium Hydroxide

Skin conditions at work can be diagnosed by appearance and locations of affected sites.

Some cleaning products can trigger asthma symptoms

Asthma is a disease of the lungs that makes breathing difficult. In asthma, the following can cause obstruction to airflow:

- Inflammation and swelling of the air passageways
- Temporary narrowing of the airways
- Cells of the airways produce more mucus.

Products like bleach, glass cleaners, detergents, air fresheners, and disinfectants have been linked to causing or worsening asthma symptoms.



WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU ARE OR SUSPECT YOU ARE EXPOSED TO CLEANING CHEMICALS?

If you have concerns about potential exposures, you can consult with specialists such as occupational medicine doctors and/or industrial hygienists. They can assist employers and workers to assess and reduce hazards in the workplace and provide training on how to safely work with chemicals or find alternative cleaning products. If you make an appointment, bring information (such as the name and Safety Data Sheet) on the possible disinfectants and other chemicals you use.

You should:

Report any safety concerns with your supervisor

Wear appropriate protective clothing

Aprons, hand protection, and protective eyewear can reduce your exposure from spills or splashes.

Minimize contact with hazardous chemicals

If you are an employer or are in charge of choosing which cleaning products to use, choose safer cleaning chemicals.

- Read Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for cleaning products. SDS describe hazardous ingredients, possible symptoms and first-aid if exposed, and recommended personal protective equipment to use.
- If possible, use cleaners (cleans by removing dirt) over sanitizers or disinfectants (cleans by reducing microorganisms with chemicals). Depending on what you are cleaning, sanitizers or disinfectants may be necessary. If this is the case, choose products with chemicals effective against the type of microorganisms you are trying to reduce.
- Be wary of “green” labeling. Just because a product is marked “green” doesn’t necessarily mean it’s safe. Check how the certifying organization defines “green.”

Do not mix cleaning chemicals

Bleach and ammonia are two chemicals that when mixed can cause severe lung damage.

Wash your hands after using cleaning products

Employers must provide a safe working environment

This includes:

- Providing Health and Safety Training
- Providing and making available Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) and adequate work tools.
- Using cleaning products that are Ready to Use (RTU) and avoiding use of chemicals that require mixing at work.
- Providing Personal Protective Equipment such as: clothing, adequate gloves, goggles, respirators and information on when to use them
- Labels on products used with information on contents and hazards
- Provide alternatives to implement adequate ventilation
- A place to wash up after using chemicals

Training should include:

- Chemical hazards and warnings
- How to use and store chemicals
- What to do if there is a spill or emergency
- Where to access and how to use chemical information labels and data sheets

Use special caution when using cleaners with antibacterial or antimicrobial properties. Look for these words in the labels: Benzalkonium chlorides, and names that end in “ammonium chloride”

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET HURT

In the case of a medical emergency, seek treatment at the nearest emergency room or urgent care facility. After appropriate first aid is applied and further treatment is needed, you should visit an occupational health specialist, who can provide treatment and tools to prevent further injury.

The information is for educational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you have regarding your medical care.



Mount Sinai *Selikoff Centers for Occupational Health*

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