

Occupational Health Branch Announcement

Newly Revised Consensus Standard for Cleaning Products Released

Cleaning products come in a wide array of formulas, types, and packaging and include many different ingredients. Some of these ingredients can be quite hazardous – corrosive to eyes and skin, highly toxic, absorbed through the skin, and can cause breathing problems like asthma.

The people most at risk are those who work every day with these chemicals such as janitors, cleaners, and maintenance workers. For example, the Occupational Health Branch (OHB) found that in California the rate of work-related asthma (WRA) among janitors and cleaners is nearly double the rate in the overall workforce. Nationally, in states that keep track of WRA, 12% of all confirmed cases of WRA were associated with cleaning products.*

However, other workers, building occupants, and bystanders, such as teachers, students, healthcare workers, and office employees can also be affected by the use of these chemicals, which can linger in the air even after the cleaning work is completed.

In today's marketplace there are many "green" claims being made to sell cleaning products. Product labels tout that the ingredients are "natural," "organic," and "Earth-friendly." But how can buyers sort out which claims are meaningful and which aren't? The best way is to seek out products that have been certified by third-party organizations that issue openly published standards developed in a process that involves all types of stakeholders. One example is Green Seal, a non-profit organization that issues environmental standards and reviews and audits applicants according to those standards. Green Seal has just released an updated version of its "Environmental Standard for Industrial and Institutional Cleaners – GS-37." OHB staff participated in the development of this revised standard along with a diverse group of stakeholders, including other public health professionals, cleaning product manufacturers and distributors, advocacy groups, and other standard-setting organizations. The Centers for Disease Control - National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the Massachusetts and New York State Public Health Departments, and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville had members on the standard development team which was at the core of the revision process.

This new version of GS-37 has stronger health and environmental protections including a prohibition of ingredients known to cause allergic-type asthma, strengthened toxicity and corrosivity limits, tighter limits on ingredients that can cause indoor air pollution, and strengthened limits on chemicals that can be absorbed through the skin. Employers should purchase products using guidelines such as GS-37 rather than relying strictly on marketing claims.

The revised GS-37 standard will fully go into effect in January 2010, allowing companies who currently sell GS-37-certified products time to reformulate their products, if needed. However, many products are already certified under the new 2008 standard. If you are buying GS-37-certified products check to make sure they comply with the 2008 standard. You can see a list of certified cleaning products at the [Green Seal website](http://www.greenseal.org).
(www.greenseal.org/findaproduct/i&icleaners.cfm)

For more information at the [Green Seal website](http://www.greenseal.org).
(www.greenseal.org/index.cfm)

For more information on OHB work in this area, see our web pages on [tracking work-related asthma](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/WRAPP). (www.cdph.ca.gov/WRAPP)

You can also visit the [Occupational Health Branch website](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/OHB).
(www.cdph.ca.gov/OHB)

* Rosenman et al. 2003. "Cleaning products and work- related asthma." Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. Volume 45(5):556-563.