The Business Case for Cleaning Product Ingredient Disclosure Legislation

Cleaning product manufacturers are not required by law to fully list product ingredients on their labels. So most do not. This leaves business buyers and other consumers with no idea whether a product they—or workers in their facilities—are using exposes them to chemicals linked to health problems.

Chemicals found in ordinary cleaning products may, or do, increase the risk for cancer, asthma and other serious illnesses; even for birth defects. And many millions of people—nearly 13% of the population—are sensitive to common cleaning product ingredients. This can result in unsafe working conditions, compromised productivity and potential liability.

These are largely avoidable problems, but without ingredient disclosure on labels, buyers cannot make the informed decisions essential to their health and the fair functioning of a free-market economy.

What you don’t know can hurt you...and your workers

Every day, we come in contact, directly or indirectly, with dish soaps, laundry detergents, air fresheners, disinfectants, glass cleaners, stain removers, and countless other cleaning products. No federal or state law requires cleaning product labels to list all ingredients, so chemicals used in products remain largely a mystery. California State Senator Lara has introduced Senate Bill 258 calling for cleaning product manufacturers to fully disclose product ingredients; a similar bill H.R. 2728 has been introduced by Rep. Ruiz (D-CA) at the federal level.

Science has identified chemicals found in ordinary cleaning products that are likely or known to increase the risk of asthma, birth defects, cancer and other serious, chronic medical conditions. Bio-monitoring studies measuring chemicals in people’s bodies have detected many risky chemicals such as Triclosan, phthalates and toluene in blood, urine, breast milk, and the umbilical cord blood of newborns. Without ingredient lists on labels, it’s nearly impossible to avoid harmful exposure.

Why businesses support better labeling laws:

Safer chemicals are an established demand. Manufacturers, retailers, care facilities, medical providers, local governments and facility managers for business operations of all kinds are searching for products that have low toxicity and degrade into innocuous substances in the environment. Consumers and business buyers all want greater transparency, but without fair labeling laws, it is extremely difficult and time-consuming to determine what chemicals are in products, what hazards they pose, and whether safer alternatives are on the market.

“W e’re proud to list our ingredients on our ECOS cleaning product labels. Consumers are concerned about their health and they want and deserve to know what’s in the products they bring into their homes. Our 50 years of continued growth shows that businesses can fully disclose all ingredients without it negatively affecting their bottom lines.”

– Kelly Vlahakis Hanks,
President/CEO, Earth Friendly Products

Occupational exposures are a special concern to business. The Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) companies are required by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) to provide on each product do not list all the ingredients. Studies show elevated risks for custodians, housekeepers and other cleaning employees who regularly use chemical products. Transparency can create safer working conditions.

Lack of ingredient labeling transparency impairs the market. Responsible companies that respond to consumer demand for safer products have to compete with those that do not. This violates the essential business value of transparency. As the Federal Trade Commission’s Fair Packaging and Labeling Act states, “Informed consumers are essential to the fair and efficient functioning of a free-market economy.”
Lack of ingredient transparency is already eroding cleaning product sales. In the absence of complete, accurate chemical ingredient listings on labels, an increasing minority of consumers concoct their own. The mainstreaming of D-I-Y cleaners not only poses a threat to store-bought cleaning products, but may also pose a threat to consumers’ health. Government needs to support companies’ providing needed information.

1 Nearly 13% of people report themselves as sensitive to certain common environmental chemicals such as are found in cleaning products. (Caress, S.M.; Steinemann, A.C. Prevalence of multiple chemical sensitivities: a population-based study in the southeastern United States. American Journal of Public Health. 2004;94(5):746-747)


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