



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.¹ 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.² 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.

“We'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.”



- **Accurate labeling is established law for many other products.** From packaged food to pesticides, many products already have complete ingredients listed on their labels. Cleaning products should, too. Companies may offer more details on their websites, but labels must be the primary location for ingredient listings.
- **Listing fragrance ingredients helps buyers without harming formulators.** “Fragrance” and “surfactants” are not ingredients; they are formulations that often include toxic chemicals. “Fragrance” may refer to a mix of any of nearly 3,000 chemicals, including potentially harmful toxins. Fully listing the chemicals in fragrances and other formulations on product labels — without including quantities that make up the recipes — is fair to formulators and to consumers.
- **Accurate listings on labels do not compromise trade secrets.** Ingredient labeling opponents fear listing may unfairly expose their trade secrets, but with modern technology, any company can reverse-engineer any product to determine its ingredients. Ingredient listings on labels would simply make that existing information available downstream. Furthermore, proposed federal ingredient disclosure law does not require product recipes (quantities of each chemical in the product), only a list.
- **Periodic label updates are already routine in product marketing.** Some opponents say changing product labels to include ingredients is “too hard” or “too expensive,” but almost all companies know better. Consumer packaged goods companies frequently modify their product labels to adapt to changing market conditions and laws that reflect changing consumer awareness. Cleaning product companies can, too.
- **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.³ 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.

“Every cleaning product company knows what is in each others’ products. Only the consumer is left in the dark. That has to change.”

– John Replogle,
CEO, Seventh Generation

Bottom line:

Complete product ingredients listings on labels where buyers can conveniently find them, lets users make accurate comparisons and buy products that meet their needs. Responsible companies already fully disclose ingredients, including those in fragrances, used in their products — and consumers reward them with healthy sales. But the process must be made fair and efficient for all, with accurate labeling laws.

Everyone is exposed to an array of cleaning products, willingly or not. To make households, communities and workplaces safer, companies can transition from cleaning products with toxic substances — if ingredient labeling is consistent and accurate. This transition will spur innovative new products using safer, cleaner chemicals; in turn creating jobs and providing health-related cost savings at all levels.

Updates to laws that govern and specify how chemicals in commerce are used, tested and reported on are in work. Meanwhile, laws that facilitate accurate ingredient labeling will help the market itself hasten these good outcomes. ★

“While empowering people to make informed purchasing decisions, transparency in the cleaning product industry will spur innovation to avoid harmful ingredients, result in even better consumer protection, and promote business growth.”

– Christopher Gavigan,
Co-founder and Chief Purpose Officer,
The Honest Company

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 south-eastern United States. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2004;94(5):746-747)

² Environmental awareness is a key factor in consumer cleaning product choices. <http://www.smithersapex.com/news/2013/november/5-important-trends-in-the-cleaning-products-market>

³ Lack of cleaning product ingredient labeling they feel they can trust is moving many consumers to concoct their own products. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/home/sc-cons-homemade-cleaners-savvy-0218-20160223-story.html>



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The American Sustainable Business Council is a coalition of business organizations and companies committed to advancing market solutions and policies to support a sustainable economy. ASBC and its organizational members represent more than 250,000 businesses across the United States.

Companies for Safer Chemicals is a campaign representing thousands of businesses seeking meaningful chemical safety reform legislation that clearly identifies unsafe chemicals, takes harmful chemicals off the market, provides incentives for producing safer products, and promotes transparency.

To take action on ingredient disclosure, please visit <http://asbcouncil.org/action-center/campaigns>