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NEWSLETTER FROM THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Busting Green Cleaning Myths

It's not often that the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has the opportunity to welcome people to a movie premiere. But that was the case recently when Commissioner Rob Klee greeted the audience, which included local and state school and health officials.

The new movie focuses on the hazards of toxic cleaners in schools and the need for compliance with state laws mandating the use of "green" cleaning products in schools. It is a part of DEEP's "Wastebusters" series, which parodies a popular cable television show known as "Mythbusters." The video was a cooperative effort between DEEP's Office of Pollution Prevention, the CT Department of Public Health (DPH), and Middlesex Community College, with funding from the U.S. EPA.



Elementary school student Quinn joins the Wastebusters to dispel cleaning myths at his school.

Connecticut's green cleaning law was put in place to protect students and school staff members from indoor air quality issues that can impact health, e.g., cleaning products triggering asthma attacks. The video was created to help address the problems associated with parents and teachers bringing toxic cleaners into schools. Many of the messages communicated by school maintenance staff to address this issue have not been heard. Using humor and a Wastebusters theme, the video strives to convince parents and teachers that green cleaning products work as well as regular cleaners — and are safer for people's health and the environment.

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If you would like to watch the Wastebusters tackle the two myths, “There’s nothing wrong with regular cleaning products,” and “Green cleaning products don’t work as well as regular cleaners,” go to CTDEEPVideos on [YouTube](#) or [CTDPH’s Schools webpage](#). Please feel free to share the 8-minute video with your local school, PTA and anyone you think would be interested in learning about safer cleaning products.

How Do I Choose a Green Cleaner?

Connecticut state laws require **schools** and **state agencies** to clean with environmentally preferable products known as “green cleaners.” But how do they know what cleaners to buy? Both laws required the CT Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to approve of a certification program to guide purchases. The DAS, in consultation with DEEP and DPH selected two of the oldest and most well-respected environmental certification programs, **Green Seal** and **Ecologo**.

Both Green Seal and Ecologo are “third party” certification agencies that test products on a range of characteristics. Third party certifiers are independent of the company that makes the cleaner and are not part of any association with which the manufacturer is affiliated. Green Seal and Ecologo use science and rigorous testing of all ingredients for toxicity. They also test for effectiveness of the product as a cleaner and look at its life-cycle impact on the environment, from raw material sourcing to disposal.



The Green Seal standard for industrial cleaners, **GS-37** is probably the most well-known category of safe and effective cleaners that can be used in CT schools or state agencies. This is the main reason it has been chosen (along with UL’s Ecologo) by almost half the states and numerous school systems, including the State of Connecticut.

But, what if you are a small business, faith community or home — can you find Green Seal or Ecologo products at the market? Many products in these categories would not be suitable for smaller commercial sites or homes. They often come in concentrates and only make sense for cleaning large buildings. While there seems to be a lot of healthy cleaning choices in the supermarket aisle or online, it can be daunting to choose a cleaning product as the “**greenwash**” of marketing claims obscures real information about the safety of ingredients for humans and the environment. The FTC provides **Environmental Guidelines** that caution companies against making meaningless marketing claims like “environmentally preferable” or “green” or “biodegradable.” However, FTC officials say they rely primarily on complaints from consumers or competitors to pursue greenwashing. So — consumers, beware!



epa.gov/saferchoice

When buying for a small business or non-profit, or your own home, Green Seal and Ecologo offer only a limited number of products that are appropriate for a smaller setting. However, there is a good option for sourcing green cleaning products that meet the highest environmental and health standards — EPA’s Design for the Environment (DfE) program has a new label called **Safer Choice**.

EPA’s Safer Choice scientists and advisors review health and safety claims made by manufacturers, screening for a number of chemical attributes, and approve use of the “Safer Choice” label only if a product meets strict quality and performance standards. Of course, another option is to “make your own” cleaning products using safer ingredients — there are some recipes at www.ct.gov/DEEP/P2.

What are Regrettable Substitutions?

We hear a lot lately about eliminating certain chemicals from products — BPA from plastics and store receipts, and Diacetyl from microwave popcorn are two that come to mind. When ingredients are found to be harmful, companies that market products in the U.S. often do not allow adequate time and research to test better alternatives, which is a complex process. Often manufacturers replace one chemical with another chemical from the same family, and as a result, the replacement has similar properties and ends up causing similar harm. This is known as a “regrettable substitution.”

In the case of microwave popcorn, Diacetyl had been widely used as an artificial flavoring that adds the flavor of butter. After severe health problems emerged among workers at microwave popcorn packaging plants and flavorings manufacturing facilities, the National Institute for Occupational Safety began investigating. As a result, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has listed Diacetyl as an irritant to the eyes, skin, and respiratory system and indicated that it is suspected of causing cumulative lung damage. Manufacturers began substituting Diacetyl with 2,3-pentanedione and labelling their product as Diacetyl-free. Yet 2,3-pentanedione causes similar damage as Diacetyl to lung airways in rats and gene alterations in their brains.

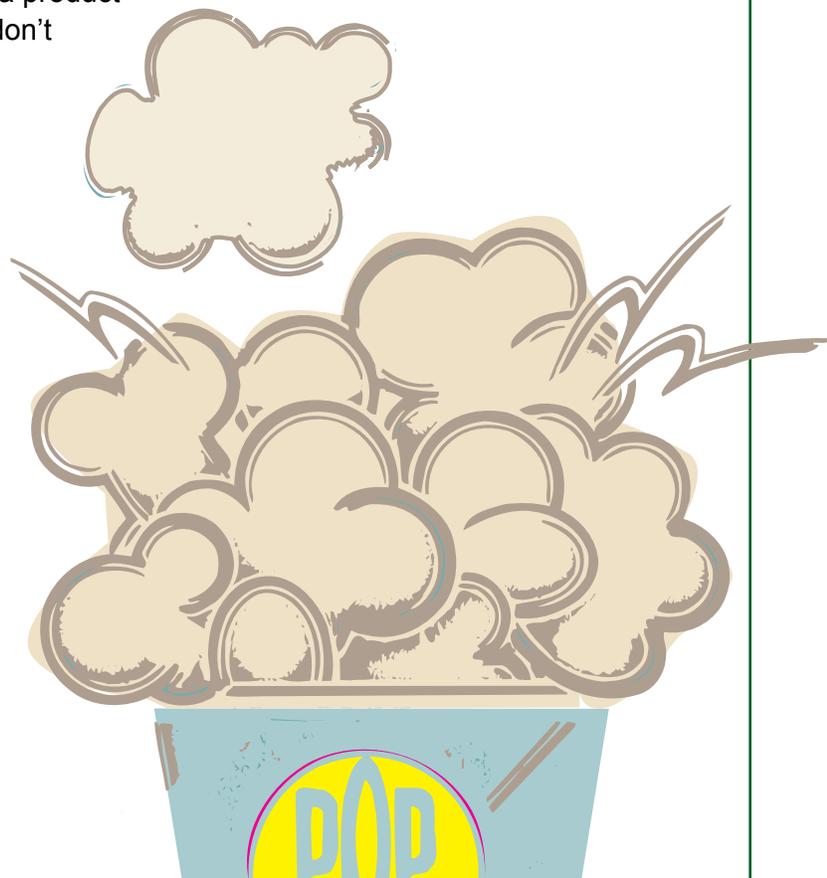
What Can I Do?

As consumers we all need to be asking ourselves, “What’s in the products we buy and can we find the safest ones?” Just because a product is advertised as being “free of” a problem chemical, don’t assume that the replacement has no health or other consequences. Until more comprehensive chemical analysis is required, take the time to consider your options and become a more educated consumer.

As you learn more about harmful chemicals and read product labels to try to avoid them, you might also try getting away from that type of product altogether. For example, you could look for microwave popcorn that has no artificial flavoring, but better yet, you could use regular popcorn and make it in a glass microwave-safe bowl ([Food Network recipe](#)) or on the stove.

Another example would be plastic water bottles. Rather than worrying if the chemical that replaced the **BPA** in those BPA-free bottles creates the same health issues, switch to a stainless steel or silicone-wrapped glass water bottle — they are also good environmental choices.

For information on Alternatives Assessments, go to www.turi.org.



Ask Eartha



encouraged to include a note that will be received by the new owner — your “SoleMate.”

I'm putting away my sandals until next summer and noticed several pairs of shoes in my closet that I no longer wear. Some are worn out, but others are in good condition, just not comfortable for me or in style. I know I can donate clothes to thrift stores but what should I do with shoes? Nancy T., Newington, CT

Regardless of the condition, there is another use for your unwanted shoes, even the ones that are no longer a complete pair. Before presenting reuse and recycling options, I'd like to suggest my readers think carefully when purchasing shoes. As with all consumer goods, you can help your wallet and the environment by limiting your purchases and selecting long-lasting, durable products. When it comes to shoes, you may have to spend a little more on a good quality, well-made pair that will last years rather than buying the inexpensive ones that only last a season. Quality shoes can also be repaired, so consider this option before removing them from your wardrobe. There are dozens of local shoe repair businesses throughout Connecticut that can replace a worn-out sole, fix a heel and re-stitch leather and fabric. You can find one near you by doing a quick internet search.



where they will be reused if in good enough condition to do so; the next best option is to recycle the material they are made of.

One manufacturer of sandals, clogs and flip-flops, **Okabashi**, guarantees their products for two years and claims they can typically last for four. You can return their worn shoes to them to be recycled; the company states the average pair contains 15-25% recycled material.



Goodwill Industries, Salvation Army and Savers are familiar organizations that can benefit from your donation. Shoes that are in usable condition are resold in their thrift stores at inexpensive prices and reused by whomever purchases them. Shoes that are too worn to wear, and “singles,” can also be donated since these are sold to textile recycling facilities where the materials are separated for reuse. Leather, mesh fabric, cotton laces, rubber and polyurethane soles can all be recycled and repurposed. Collection boxes are another place where you can donate shoes. For more information check out **DEEP's “What Do I Do With”** webpage.

Granted, there will still be shoes that just need to go for one reason or another. Choose an option



donated shoes for resale and reuse in the U.S. and around the world. Those donating a pair are

If it's worn-out athletic shoes you need to toss, you can donate them to **Nike's Reuse a Shoe** program where they're ground down and turned into material for playground surfaces, gym floors, running tracks, outdoor courts, carpet underlay and synthetic turf.



Your old shoes can have a new life. Decide which option is best and they can help someone in need, reduce waste and pollution and conserve our natural resources!

Eartha

Eartha answers selected environmental questions. Email your question to judith.prill@ct.gov and watch future issues for your answer.

Doing a fall clean-out of your house, garage or shed? DEEP's **What Do I Do With...?** webpage lists where you can donate or recycle your unwanted items.



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