

DISASTER CLEAN-UP: QUESTIONS ABOUT CLEANING PRODUCTS

University of Illinois Extension * University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign * Disaster Resource

The right type of cleaner can make a major clean-up job or an everyday clean-up job easier. In either situation, the best product choice is one that not only cleans away soil, but also kills bacteria and/or a wide variety of microorganisms.

Clean-up after a disaster requires a lot of time, patience and skill. It helps if you have the right cleaner, one that is appropriate for the job and is a disinfectant as well. Any retailer's shelf contains many brands of various types of cleaners: all purpose, glass, basin-tub-tile, bathroom, detergents, bleaches and so forth. Many companies use one brand name for several types of products, both powdered and liquid. It's very confusing, but you can choose an appropriate cleaner if you take time to read the label.

What is on a cleaning product label?

Important information appears on cleaning product labels:

- Product name and manufacturer.
- Directions for use: amount to dilute; how to apply.
- Materials (such as wood, marble, aluminum or textiles) that can be damaged by product use.
- If the word "disinfectant" is on the label, an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registration number must be listed.
- Signal words (**Caution, Warning, Danger, Poison**)
- Ingredients contained in the product (such as ammonia, pine oil, isopropanol.)
- Toll-free number for information or poison control assistance.
- Statement of practical treatment, such as: "If swallowed, give a glassful of water. Call a physician."

Do all cleaning product labels have hazard warnings?

No, not unless they involve a potential specific hazard. All products are governed by the Federal Hazardous Substances Act that was passed in 1960. This covers household cleaning products that are expected to be stored in the home or garage, but specifically excludes food, drugs and pesticides. These are covered by other legislation. The signal words Caution, Warning, Danger must appear on the main panel of the label with the specific hazard following. Additional information such as "Keep out of reach of Children" is also required.

What products typically have the "Caution" label?

Most automatic dishwashing and laundry detergents. Common warnings are: Eye Irritant, Skin Irritant, Harmful if Swallowed. These generally are not expected to cause permanent damage, but an inflammation of the affected area might occur.

Caution or Warning also appears on products that are flammable or apt to explode if heated.

(Continued on the next page)

For more information contact your local Extension office:



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Disaster Resources Web site:
<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~disaster>

