

# Ways to Reduce Harmful Chemicals in your Home



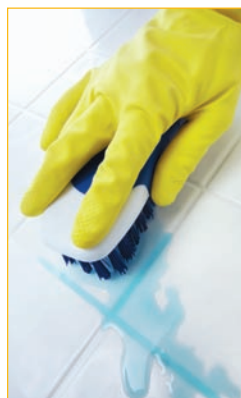
*From the foods we eat to how we maintain our yards and clean our homes, we can be exposed to chemicals in many ways.*



According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, only a fraction of the more than 75,000 registered chemicals have gone through complete testing for human health concerns. Some chemicals have immediate toxic effects. Others are toxic to our bodies only after repeated, long-term exposure. *Children are especially susceptible to the negative effects of chemicals. Pound for pound, children breathe more air, drink more water, and eat more food, and when they play, they crawl and put things in their mouths. As a result, children have an increased chance of exposure to potential pollutants.*

You can make simple changes to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals at home by considering the options below:

- *If you have household hazardous products that you don't want or need, dispose of them.* Give usable products to a friend or neighbor who will use them up. If products are unusable or you don't know someone who can use them, take them to a Hennepin County Drop-off Facility to be disposed of properly.
- *If you have a mercury thermometer in your home, take it to your county's household hazardous waste collection site.* The collection sites accept fever and kitchen thermometers that contain mercury. If you need to use a thermometer, use a mercury-free alternative such as an alcohol or digital thermometer.
- *Remove your shoes at the entrance to your home.* Your shoes can track in hazardous substances from outside such as weed and bug killers. Keep a floor mat at the entrance for visitors.
- *Use pump spray products instead of aerosols.* Aerosols put unnecessary chemicals in indoor air when you use them in the house, and the mist produced by a pressurized aerosol can is finer and more easily inhaled than the mist from a pump spray.



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- **Avoid chemical air fresheners.** To freshen the air, open the windows or simmer a mixture of cloves and cinnamon in water.
- **Avoid laundry and dishwasher products that contain chlorine or chlorine bleach (sodium hypochlorite).** If whitening is needed, use a non-chlorine bleach with oxygen or hydrogen peroxide.
- **Avoid the chemicals used in dry cleaning.** Clothes that have been dry cleaned release perchlorethylene (perc) gas, a chemical that is suspected to cause cancer. Air out clothes that have been dry cleaned before bringing them in your home. Better yet, buy clothes that don't need dry cleaning, or have clothes cleaned by an alternative cleaning process that does not result in the release of perc. The Minnesota Technical Assistance Program maintains a list of drycleaners who use alternative processes at [mntap.umn.edu/drycl/22-AltDryCl.htm](http://mntap.umn.edu/drycl/22-AltDryCl.htm)
- **Buy fewer household hazardous products.** Use multipurpose cleaners to avoid buying many specialty cleaners. Use single-ingredient products (baking soda, white vinegar, lemon juice, salt) that serve several functions. Sometimes muscle can replace chemicals. Try to dislodge a clog in a drain with a mechanical "snake." Scrub sink stains with an abrasive sponge. Use a dandelion digger instead of weed killer.
- **Use a fabric shower curtain instead of a vinyl one.** A vinyl shower curtain or liner releases odors and chemical gases into the air in your home. Use a shower curtain made of canvas, hemp, or polyester instead.

## Web Resources

- [hennepin.us/environment](http://hennepin.us/environment) – Hennepin County. Information for residents on year-round drop-off facilities for household hazardous wastes, seasonal collection events, and how to reduce the amount and toxicity of household hazardous waste in your home.
- [www.epa.gov/children](http://www.epa.gov/children) – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Children's Health Protection. Information on environmental risks to children's health and tips to protect children from environmental risks.
- [www.checnet.org/healthhouse/home/home.asp](http://www.checnet.org/healthhouse/home/home.asp) – Children's Health Environmental Coalition. Information on environmental health risks to children and alternatives to conventional dry cleaning.
- [householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov](http://householdproducts.nlm.nih.gov) – Household Products Database of the National Institutes of Health. Information about the ingredients in common household products, their potential health effects, and safety and handling.
- [www.mnpoison.org](http://www.mnpoison.org) – Minnesota Poison Control System. Information about common household products and poison prevention.
- [www.Reduce.org](http://www.Reduce.org) – Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Tips to reduce the amount and toxicity of waste when you shop, work, and play.
- [RethinkRecycling.com](http://RethinkRecycling.com) – Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board, comprised of the six member counties, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Residents and businesses can learn how to create less waste, recycle more and properly dispose of hazardous items.



**Hennepin County**  
Environmental Services  
612-348-3777

[hennepin.us](http://hennepin.us) search: household hazardous waste

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Your go-to guide for waste & recycling  
in the Twin Cities.