

Certification Standards Help Employers and Cleaners Buy Safer Cleaning Products

Cleaning products can be hazardous – corrosive to eyes and skin, highly toxic, and can cause asthma and other breathing problems. Custodians, cleaners, and maintenance workers are most at risk from exposure to cleaning agents. The California Department of Public Health, Occupational Health Branch (OHB), has found that work-related asthma among custodians and cleaners is double the rate in the overall workforce. Other building occupants are also affected by the use of cleaning chemicals, which can linger in the air even after the cleaning work is completed.¹

Fortunately, it is now easier to find safer cleaning products. Two independent organizations, EcoLogo and Green Seal, publish certification standards that define which attributes a product must have to receive approval. The products that are certified by EcoLogo and Green Seal can be found in stores as well as through janitorial suppliers.

Why is independent certification important? Manufacturers may claim that their products are “green,” “natural,” or “earth-friendly,” but such claims are often meaningless or misleading. To ensure that the products you buy are safer for health and the environment, look for the certification seal by independent organizations. EcoLogo and Green Seal criteria cover many attributes, such as toxicity and corrosivity limits, and also prohibit chemicals that cause allergic-type asthma, carcinogens, reproductive toxicants, and some endocrine disruptors. The table below summarizes their new and revised standards:

Green Seal Standards – web site link	Types of Products
GS-52* - Specialty Cleaning Products for Household Use (New)	Dish soaps, graffiti removers, car cleansers, deck/outdoor cleaners, odor removers, polishes, and waxes
GS-53* - Specialty Cleaning Products for Industrial/Institutional Use (New)	Dish soaps, graffiti removers, car cleansers, deck/outdoor cleaners, odor removers, polishes, and waxes
GS-37 - Environmental Standard for Industrial/Institutional Cleaners (Revised)	General-purpose, restroom, glass, and carpet cleaning products
EcoLogo Standard – web site link	Types of Products
CCD-146 - Hardsurface Cleaners (Revised)	General purpose/bathroom cleaners, dish detergents, degreasers, and other cleaning products for household, institutional, and industrial use

* Because Green Seal allows the use of enzymes, which can cause allergic-type asthma, OHB recommends only GS-52 and GS-53 products that do not contain enzymes.

The EcoLogo and Green Seal standards were developed by a variety of stakeholders, such as public health professionals, product manufacturers, advocacy groups, and end users. OHB participated in the development and revision of these cleaning product standards because its Work-Related Asthma Prevention Program has found that nearly 11% of work-related asthma cases in California were associated with cleaning products. OHB has successfully argued for the prohibition of ingredients known to cause allergic-type asthma in the above standards with the exception of enzymes in the GS-52 and GS-53 standards.

For more information on OHB’s Work-related Asthma Prevention Program go to:
www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohsep/Pages/Asthma.aspx.

Occupational Health Branch website: www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohb

¹ <http://www.ewg.org/files/2009/10/school-cleaners/EWGschoolcleaningsupplies.pdf>