



## What's Behind the Shine?

Everyone likes a clean home, but few of us like the chore of cleaning. Even worse, we often rely on a cocktail of hazardous substances to make our bathrooms sparkle or our floors shine. Dishwashing detergents often contain phosphates that pollute the groundwater; wood polish generally contains flammable toxins like nitrobenzene; and laundry detergent may contain bleach and other corrosives. We lock these compounds away in closets or under the sink to keep them from our children—but we often don't consider what they may be doing to our own bodies.

Even as they help us pick up dirt and dust, many modern cleaners irritate our skin, eyes, and lungs. They can also leave toxic residues or pollute the water when we rinse them down the drain. But keeping our homes clean and avoiding toxic cleaners don't have to be mutually exclusive. Several companies now produce “green” cleaners that avoid ingredients that are toxic or don't biodegrade. Green cleaners can also be made from a range of safer substances we might already have around the house.

## Did you know?

- \*Cleaning products were responsible for nearly 10 percent of all toxic exposures reported to U.S. Poison Control Centers in 2000, accounting for 206,636 calls. Of these, nearly two-thirds involved children under six, who can swallow or spill cleaners stored or left open inside the home.
- \*According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the air inside the typical home is on average 2-5 times more polluted than the air just outside—and in extreme cases 100 times more contaminated—largely because of household cleaners and pesticides.
- \*The Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project reports that 6 out of every 100 janitors in Washington state have lost time from their jobs as a result of injuries linked to toxic cleaning products, particularly glass and toilet cleaners and degreasers.
- \*In a 2002 U.S. Geological Survey study of contaminants in U.S. stream water, 69 percent of streams sampled contained persistent detergent metabolites, and 66 percent contained disinfectants.

## Success!

- ❖ At least eleven U.S. states have banned phosphate from detergents sold within their borders, though the ingredient is still permitted in most of the country. Other states, cities, and counties have gone a step further by not just banning certain products, but also requiring the use of nonpolluting cleaners.
- ❖ In 1994, the city of Santa Monica, California, was able to replace traditional cleaners with less-toxic options in 15 of 17 product categories, saving 5 percent on annual costs and avoiding the purchase of 1.5 tons of hazardous materials per year.
- ❖ The U.S. market for natural household cleaning products has grown to \$100 million annually, according to natural goods retailer Seventh Generation. This represents just one percent of the total household cleaners market, but it's been growing by 18-25 percent each year for the last five years.