

Spring Cleaning with Earth Day in Mind

by Laressa Nelson

Earth Day is conveniently celebrated in a great month for spring cleaning, which gives us good reason to comb through our cabinets and re-evaluate our cleaning supplies. Many of us are interested in non-toxic cleaners to ensure the safety of our families or to shield them and ourselves from respiratory irritants that contribute to allergies and asthma. Some also consider the bigger picture; the impact of the household products that we wash down our drains and flush into our water supply. Yet, we also value effective cleaning ability and affordability, and finding products that fit the bill is often challenging.

"The younger generations today have grown up with green culture; it's engrained in them, part of their being," explains Samuel Burlum, CEO of Extreme Energy Solutions, makers of Extreme Kleaner, a biodegradable, nontoxic, all-purpose cleaner/degreaser available through *Amazon.com* and at Ace Hardware and True Value Hardware stores in Madison area. "They are more conscious and aware of the impact of their buying choices and how they affect the environment around them."

Consumer voices are making a difference. Mintel, a Chicago-based



market research company, noted that the green cleaning category quadrupled its sales between 2003 and 2008, from \$17.7 million to \$64.5 million, and that the market share of eco-friendly cleaners has increased ten-fold since 2003,

from 3 percent to more than 30 percent. Meanwhile, sales in the conventional cleaning category declined by 7 percent, when inflation was accounted for, between 2002 and 2007. This economic reality is certainly the driving force behind the development of eco-friendly cleaners by megacorporations and the private-label brands of big-box retailers like Wal-Mart, which introduced its Great Value Naturals line in November 2014.

As consumers that manage our households, we are smart to be concerned about the ingredients in the cleaning supplies we use. According to a 2011 article in *Mother Jones* magazine, nearly 75,000 chemicals have been introduced into consumer products and only about 5 percent of those have been tested for potential side effects and health risks. Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE), an organization that amplifies women's voices to eliminate harmful chemicals, reports that cleaning product companies are not required to disclose their ingredients.

WVE commissioned an independent laboratory test for toxic chemicals in 20 popular cleaning products from the top five companies in the industry: Clorox, Procter & Gamble, Reckitt Benckiser, SC Johnson and Son, and

Sunshine Makers (Simple Green). They found undisclosed chemicals linked to reproductive toxins, carcinogens, hormone disruptors and allergies. WVE offers tips and provides the names of "No Secrets" companies, those that list all the ingredients in their cleaning products, right down to the fragrance.

Burlum says that toxic ingredients excluded from Extreme Kleaner's formulation are often found in other cleaners. The company's Product Comparison Sheet, which lists those ingredients and their known risks, can be found at Tinyurl.com/ExtremeKleanerCompare.

Fortunately, third-party consumer advocacy groups and certification programs help consumers make better choices. The Environmental Protection Agency offers a Design for the Environment stamp of approval, and the nonprofit GreenSeal, in existence since 1989, uses science-based programs to empower consumers to create a more sustainable world and offers an accreditation using international guidelines for environmental labeling programs. NSF International is an independent, accredited consumer protection nonprofit that develops standards and tests and also certifies and audits consumer products and systems to protect and improve global human health and the environment.

Rather than grabbing the first household cleaner labeled "green" from the grocery store shelf, consumers should check products for both ingredients and third-party verification of their safety for people, pets and the environment.

Resources: ExtremeKleaner.com, Tinyurl.com/adweek-eco-cleaning, WomensVoices.org. See Extreme Kleaner ad, page 32.

Laressa Nelson is a contributing editor to Natural Awakenings magazines across the country.



Extreme Kleaner