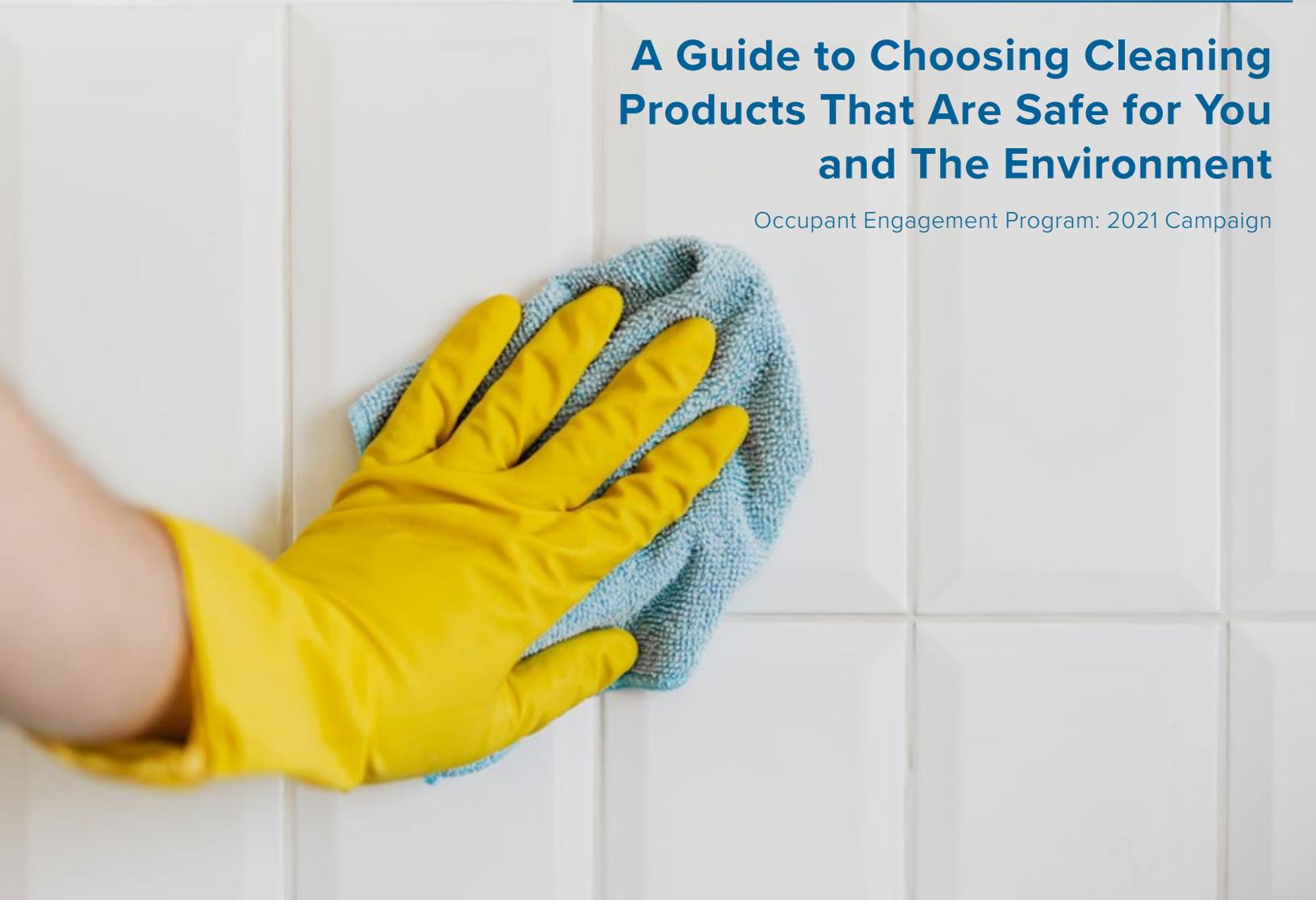




GREEN & EFFECTIVE CLEANING GUIDE

**A Guide to Choosing Cleaning
Products That Are Safe for You
and The Environment**

Occupant Engagement Program: 2021 Campaign





WHY GREEN CLEANING?

Cleaning regularly is an important part of maintaining a healthy indoor environment.

By understanding what safe and effective cleaning is, we can swap out potentially harmful cleaning products with green alternatives. This toolkit is designed to provide easy strategies for safe and sustainable cleaning in any home.

CONTENT

- **Be Aware of the Hazards of Cleaning Products**
- **Choose Safe & Effective Cleaning Products**
- **Take Precautions When Using Cleaning Products**
- **Additional Resources**

Note: This guide does not include information on DIY cleaning products. While DIY cleaning products such as those made using vinegar and baking soda can be effective alternatives for aesthetic cleaning (i.e. for use on non high-touch surfaces, like mirrors), the efficacy of these ingredients has not been proven in all applications.





KNOW THE HAZARDS



In Canada, cleaning products are only required to list warnings about acute health hazards, but are not required to list warnings about possible chronic health conditions or environmental hazards linked to the chemicals they contain. Research suggests that many of the cleaning products we are exposed to on a daily basis contain potentially harmful chemicals that are linked to a range of health conditions. To further complicate the issue, cleaning products are not required to list ingredients on their packaging – some manufacturers choose to disclose this information voluntarily, while others do not.

IDENTIFY YOUR RISK

It is important to be aware of the health hazards associated with cleaning products, so you can make informed decisions. Fortunately, organizations like the Environmental Working Group (EWG) have developed tools to help consumers identify the health risks associated with their products.

Before determining the need to replace your existing cleaning products, visit [EWG's Guide to Healthy Cleaning](#) to understand how your cleaning products are ranked according to a comprehensive assessment that explores everything from the product's Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) to health hazards associated with each product.



SELECT FOR SAFETY

Choosing products that are safe and effective can be challenging. Learning how to decipher labels, understanding which certifications are reliable, and becoming familiar with reputable brands will help you navigate the complex cleaning product market.

When selecting cleaning products, be aware of green washing and invalid marketing claims. Many claims we see on cleaning product labels are not regulated, so it's important to understand what these terms actually mean. Below, you will find information on some commonly used terms.

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- **Natural or Plant-Based.** When used in cleaning products, the terms 'natural' and 'plant based' are not regulated and can therefore be misleading. In general, these claims are used to market products that are formulated with ingredients derived from plants, however due to a lack of regulation on their use or a requirement to disclose the ingredient contents, they cannot be validated.
 - **Biodegradable.** The term biodegradable refers to ingredients that have the natural ability to break down over time, therefore causing less harm to our environment. In Canada, there are guidelines around the use of this term but it is not regulated and therefore is difficult to validate.





SELECT FOR SAFETY

- **Organic.** The term organic typically means a lack of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. In Canada, organic labelling regulations only apply to [food products](#), meaning organic claims used on cleaning products are unregulated and are difficult to verify.
- **Non-Toxic.** The term non-toxic is often used to indicate that the ingredients used are not linked to any adverse health effects or environmental impacts. There is no universal standard used in Canada for identifying whether a product is non-toxic so it is difficult to verify.
- **Fragrance-Free or Unscented.** The terms fragrance-free and unscented are often sources of confusion for consumers and are not regulated. Generally, the terms fragrance-free and unscented mean that fragrances have not been added to the product. However, some products add masking agents, or chemicals to neutralize the scent of other ingredients, and these masking agents may be listed under the term 'fragrance' or 'parfum'.
- **Low-VOC or No-VOC.** VOCs are organic chemical compounds that evaporate easily under normal temperature and pressure, polluting the air around us, and are found in some cleaning products. Many VOCs have known adverse health effects, so choosing products that are 'No-VOC' is ideal. 'Low-VOC' simply means that the product has a reduced concentration of VOCs.
- **Cruelty-Free.** Cruelty-free is an unregulated claim used to indicate that the product is not tested on animals. To verify this claim, look for the [Leaping Bunny logo](#), which is a third-party certification for cruelty-free products.





WHAT TO LOOK FOR



Before trusting the claims of product certifications, be sure to investigate their verification methods. In Canada, only one green product certification is officially recognized, as detailed below:

EcoLogo. Originally developed by the Government of Canada in 1988, [EcoLogo](#) is currently used across North America. EcoLogo is designed to only allow the top 20% of products on the market to achieve certification and each product must undergo rigorous testing and auditing. The certification has a criteria for everything from health and environmental impacts to performance and energy. While EcoLogo is Canada's only officially recognized certification for cleaning products, you may come across other widely-used certification programs such as [Green Seal](#) and [EPA Safer Choice](#), both of which are reputable, U.S. based programs.

The following is a list of Canadian-owned and manufactured cleaning brands who make a wide range of EcoLogo certified cleaning products. These brands are readily available at local or online retailers across Canada.

- [Attitude Living](#)
- [Eco-Max](#)
- [Nature Clean](#)
- [Biovert](#)
- [BiOFACTOR](#)
- [Mrs. Meyer's Clean Day](#)



TAKE PRECAUTIONS

Taking the proper precautions when using cleaning products is an important step in reducing your exposure to potentially harmful chemicals. Below are tips for the proper handling and use of cleaning products at home.

- **Follow Product Guidelines.** Always read the label of your cleaning products and only use them according to the manufacturer's directions and guidelines.
- **Increase Ventilation.** Ensure you have adequate ventilation while using cleaning products. If possible, open windows before, during, and after the use of any harsh cleaning products to reduce the risk of inhalation and avoid using harsh cleaning products in small, enclosed spaces.
- **Protect with PPE.** Wear a mask, gloves, and protective eye coverings when using cleaning products to reduce exposure and the risk of irritation to eyes, skin and respiratory tract.
- **Remember Safe Storage.** Always store cleaning products in their original containers so that instructions for use and safety information are readily available. Keep in mind that cleaning products can be toxic to children and pets and should always be stored in a secure location, out of sight and reach.
- **Don't Mix.** Mixing cleaning products can be dangerous and can cause chemical reactions that are harmful to human health. Avoid combining cleaning products and never mix bleach with other cleaning products, especially products containing ammonia.





EXTRAS

This guide can be used as a starting point to learn about green cleaning, however we encourage you to undertake your own research to learn about what cleaning products are right for you. The following resources offer a wealth of information on green cleaning:

- [Ecologo Certification: Program Overview](#)
- [Environmental Working Group: Guide to Healthy Cleaning](#)
- [David Suzuki Foundation: How to Shop for Green Cleaners](#)
- [Eco Label Index: All Ecolabels Used in Canada](#)
- [The Eco Hub: What is Green Cleaning?](#)

