

# Manufacturers Of Cleaning Products Forced To Open Up

Jennifer Peltz, Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Consumers curious — or concerned — about the chemicals in household cleaning products will get detailed rundowns under state plans to require manufacturers to detail their products' contents.

The move to start enforcing a nearly 40-year-old state law and related regulations, apparently unique in the country, comes amid growing scrutiny of the chemicals that make up consumer goods.

While many cleanser companies have made some ingredient information available in recent years, the New York measures call for unusually detailed breakdowns, complete with percentages. They also seek any company-led research on the products' health and environmental effects.

"Due to increased public interest in such information, I have decided to begin the process of implementing the department's authority to require" the disclosures for all household and commercial cleaning products sold in New York, state Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Alexander "Pete" Grannis told the environmental law firm Earthjustice in a Sept. 3 letter. The group recently represented environmental and health advocates in an unsuccessful lawsuit seeking information under the venerable but little-used law.

Some companies have voluntarily sent data to the DEC. But the agency historically hasn't demanded the information, saying the law just allows — not requires — it to be collected and made publicly available.

The format, timeframe and other details for the disclosures are yet to be determined. Grannis has asked environmental advocates, cleanser manufacturers and state officials to meet Oct. 6 to start discussing the specifics.

While the New York law affects only the state, environmental and consumer advocates want it to spur broader scrutiny of the chemicals in cleansers.

"One hopes that by having this disclosure, there will be an incentive for these companies to start developing greener cleaning products," Earthjustice lawyer Deborah Goldberg said Thursday.

The cleanser industry says fears about potential health dangers lurking in its products are unwarranted. Manufacturers recently stepped up voluntary disclosures of product ingredients — a point they'll impress on New York regulators, said Brian Sansoni, a spokesman for the industry's major trade group, the American Cleaning Institute.

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

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"We think it's working, and the bottom line is: Consumers have more access to cleaning product information than ever," he said.

Federal environmental laws don't require ingredient lists for most household cleaning products, though some lawmakers have proposed to change that. The Consumer Product Safety Commission requires hazard warning labels on some cleansers, and the National Institutes of Health offer some health and safety information for hundreds of cleaning products, drawn from data gathered for industrial use.

Anxieties about potential toxins in everyday products — from the heavy metal cadmium in jewelry to the chemical bisphenol A in baby bottles — have mounted in recent years. Some studies have linked cleaning product components to asthma, antibiotic resistance, hormone changes and other health problems.

The American Cleaning Institute says the research is flawed, and the products are safe if used correctly. The group, until June called the Soap and Detergent Association, also notes that cleaning can protect human health by helping stop the spread of disease.

Industry groups unveiled their own ingredient-listing initiative this year, offering information on participating manufacturers' websites. Some 99 percent of American Cleaning Institute members' thousands of products are now included, Sansoni said.

As recently as a year ago, people who wanted ingredient information for Wisk laundry detergent, Sun Satations dish soap and other Sun Products Corp. items generally had to show they needed to know because of health problems, spokeswoman Marilyn Poole said.

Now, contents are listed — without specific percentages — on the Wilton, Conn.-based company's website. Some are described generally as "fragrance" to protect trade secrets, she said.

"We're not hiding, and we want it to be right out there on the website and make it easy for consumers to know," she said.

SC Johnson plans to go further, listing even contents of fragrances and dyes and adding ingredient information on the labels of such products as Pledge and Windex, said Christopher Beard, a spokesman for the Racine, Wisc.-based company.

Environmental and consumer advocates applaud the industry-driven disclosures but say they're too vague and voluntary.

"Getting to more specific information about how much of each ingredient is in a product — those things are helpful for consumers," said Urvashi Rangan, a toxicologist and the director of technical policy at Consumers Union, which publishes Consumer Reports.

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She called New York regulators' move a plus "for both consumers and the people who are making cleaning products, especially for those who are trying to raise the bar."

The National Conference of State Legislatures, the cleanser institute and consumer and environmental advocates say they aren't aware of any other law like New York's.

Then-Gov. Nelson Rockefeller said it would "provide the consumer with meaningful information" when he signed it in 1971.

"No consumer wishing to purchase a detergent for washing of clothes or dishes or for cleaning the human body, can realistically gauge the detrimental effects of such products unless informed as to the ingredients of the product," he wrote.

After coming across the law in recent years, advocacy groups including the Sierra Club and the American Lung Association sued such cleanser giants as Colgate-Palmolive Co. and Procter & Gamble Co. to try to get the measure enforced.

A judge dismissed the case in a ruling made public last month, saying the law wasn't structured to allow the groups to sue to enforce it.

The companies declined to comment or had no immediate comment.

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*Associated Press researcher Julie Reed contributed to this report.*

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