

Focus on Cleaning Products Specifically Targeted to and Used by the Latinx Community



The annual Latinx* buying power in the US is around 1.5 trillion dollars, and cleaning product companies have taken notice.¹ Colgate-Palmolive and Clorox, for example, have developed brands like Fabuloso and Fragranzia that are heavily fragranced to appeal to the Latinx community. The Fabuloso “Our Story” webpage states that “to walk into someone’s home and have it smell clean was extremely important in the Latino community to convey how well a woman took care of her house and family. Women complained: they would work hard cleaning and then, before their husbands came home, the all-important “clean” fragrance would evaporate. Along with all their hard work!” This messaging from corporations perpetuates the unfortunate myth that “clean” smells like a particular fragrance. When in actuality, “clean” should have no smell at all. The association of “good smelling” with clean is a powerful one, but it comes at a cost. Heavily fragranced brands marketed to the Latinx community like **Fabuloso**, **Fragranzia**, **Suavitel**, and **Xcelente** contain harmful chemicals that pose health risks to users.

Much of this targeted marketing is rooted in racism, sexism and classism; companies have historically profited off of the myth that cleanliness is connected to whiteness, wealth, and purity — indirectly and directly pressuring particularly women of color to meet racist cultural standards of what it means to be ‘clean’ and what it smells like to be ‘clean.’ From our bodies to our homes, there is an overarching need not necessarily to make ourselves healthier, but to make ourselves cleaner.² Scents and smells are deeply connected to cultural ideas on what ‘clean’ smells like. As a result, not only are cleaning products heavily fragranced, but manufacturers are also reinforcing harmful messages that confuses public and individual health needs with white supremacy standards of purity.



In addition, cleaning products (like Fabuloso, LA’s Totally Awesome and DG Home) commonly sold in dollar stores, which are often located in communities of color, have been found to contain harmful chemicals like lilyal and glycol ethers, both of which are reproductive toxicants. Dollar stores are often located in communities where they are the only place to purchase household goods which leaves very few options for finding safer alternatives.³ These discount stores also tend to be the preferred option since their products are more affordable than safer alternatives.

Occupational Exposure

Latinxs are also disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals in cleaning products in the workplace. A study that looked at the health of Latinx car wash workers in New York City found 60% could link their work to their health problems including shortness of breath, eye problems, skin rash and headaches.⁴ Nationally, over 60% of housekeeping cleaners are Latinx⁵ and in California 87% are Latinx.⁶

Some of the toxic chemicals that can be found in the cleaning products marketed to Latinxs include:

Diethyl phthalate (DEP)

Found in: Fragranzia products (especially Spring scent), Clorox Healthcare cleaners, Dispatch Hospital cleaners.

Diethyl phthalate is found in carpet cleaners, and some fragranced products. Exposure to diethyl phthalate can result in higher risks of preterm birth. Being born weeks early can have numerous lifelong health effects on the development of a child. Diethyl phthalate exposure can also decrease lung function and affect breathing.

Tetramethyl Acetyloctahydronaphthalenes (OTNE)

Found in: Suavitel, DG Home

OTNE is an emerging chemical of concern, frequently found to contaminate water, and is highly toxic to fish and other aquatic creatures. OTNE is a potential reproductive toxicant in studies on mice, but there is no research available to tell us how OTNE may be affecting human reproductive health. It is commonly found in fragranced laundry products such as fabric softener, dryer sheets, laundry detergent, laundry scent boosters.

Isothiazolinones: Methylisothiazolinone (MI) and Methylchlorisothiazolinone (MCI)

Found in: Suavitel, Fragranzia, Ajax, DG Home

Isothiazolinones are preservatives, used in cleaning products like cleaning wipes, dishwashing liquid soap, carpet cleaners, laundry detergents, all-purpose cleaners, and fabric softeners to prevent the growth of bacteria or other organisms in the product. MI and MCI are two of the most common chemicals causing skin allergy in the United States. They have been banned and/or restricted from use in cosmetics in many countries around the world including the European Union and Australia in recent years. There are no regulatory bans or restrictions of these chemicals in the United States.

Glycol ethers

Listed as: 2-butoxyethanol or butoxyethanol (CAS #: 111-76-2), Butoxydiglycol or 2-(2-Butoxyethoxy)-Ethanol) or diethylene glycol monobutyl ether. (CAS #: 112-34-5) or Diethylene Glycol Ethyl Ether or ethoxydiglycol. (CAS #:111-90-0)

Found in: DG Home, LA's Totally Awesome, First Force, Power Wash, Zep (car wash products)

Glycol ethers are most commonly found in institutional/janitorial products, and products sold in dollar stores, specifically spray glass cleaners, aerosol foaming glass cleaners, carpet cleaners and all-purpose cleaners. Exposure to glycol ethers during pregnancy can affect the development of the fetus's brain. Glycol ethers exposure during pregnancy can decrease IQ, affect motor function, and increase the risk of behavioral concerns such as attention deficit and hyperactivity in children.

Butylphenyl Methylpropional (Lilial)

Found in: Suavitel, Fabuloso, Fragranzia, PineSol, Xcelente, Ajax

Butylphenyl methylpropional, also known as Lilial, is a common fragrance component that is a reproductive toxin. Butylphenyl methylpropional may cause harm to a baby during pregnancy and could affect fertility. In 2020, the European Union (EU) classified butylphenyl methylpropional as a CMR 1B reproductive toxin. As a result, the chemical will be banned from cosmetics and cleaning products in the EU as of 2022.

Hexalindanopyran (Galaxolide)

Found in: Suavitel, Ajax, DG Home

Galaxolide is a fragrance chemical found in air fresheners, all-purpose cleaners, bathroom cleaners, laundry detergent, laundry scent boosters, fabric softener, dryer sheets, carpet cleaners and dish soap. Galaxolide is a widely detected water contaminant, that does not break down easily in the environment, and is highly toxic to fish and other aquatic creatures. Galaxolide is a potential endocrine disruptor and may break down the body's natural defenses against other toxic chemical exposure.

Latinxs at Increased Risk of Exposures from Cleaning Products

Latinx communities already face numerous cumulative burdens on their health based on where they live, where they work, access to quality and affordable healthcare, pollutants in their environments, and social, racial and gender injustices. For example, Latinx women are disproportionately impacted by cleaning products at work—nationally, over 60% of housekeeping cleaners are Latinx.⁷ Latinxs are more likely than whites to live in neighborhoods where high risk chemical and commercial hazardous waste facilities are located in the United States.⁸ The results of these and additional cumulative impacts particularly on low-income and communities of color are devastating. In the United States:

Communities living on the fenceline (next to chemical facilities) have higher rates of respiratory illnesses as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes.⁹ Any of these conditions can complicate a healthy pregnancy.

Hispanic women are more likely to have gaps in insurance around the time of pregnancy than white women.¹⁰

Given the numerous factors and cumulative impacts associated with these increased risks and health disparities, exposure to toxic chemicals found in cleaning products should not be adding to the problem.

Recommendations to reduce exposures:

We need stronger worker protection laws to ensure the safety and health of people who use cleaning products. Many Latinx housecleaners are exposed to cleaning products at least 8 hours a day for at least 5 days a week, resulting in much higher exposure than the average person who does not clean for a living. In addition, historically, domestic workers fall outside the scope of protections of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the agency tasked with ensuring safe and healthy working conditions. As a result, domestic workers may work in unsafe conditions without any recourse for their safety.

Furthermore, manufacturers have much more work to do to establish, document and publicly report the strict safety standards they need to apply to determine which chemicals are appropriate to use in products, and which must be replaced with safer alternatives. Safety standards must take into consideration vulnerable and overburdened populations such as workers and pregnant people.

In the absence of strong federal laws and corporate policies to ensure the safety of cleaning products and fragrance ingredients, there are measures people can immediately take to protect their health.



Recommendations to reduce exposures (continued):

- ✿ Reduce or eliminate your use of fragranced cleaning products. If you employ a domestic cleaning worker, buy products free from fragrance and with safer ingredients.
- ✿ If you employ a domestic cleaning worker, check out the domestic worker resources from Hand to Hand, which includes tips for helping to protect the health of the people working in your home. <https://domesticemployers.org/resources-and-faqs/>
- ✿ Read cleaning product labels/go to the product brand website and check whether your cleaning product contains any of the chemicals mentioned above.
- ✿ Some companies provide ingredient information in Spanish online, but many do not. Often, a company's 1-800 customer service number will have the option to receive information in Spanish, and you can ask whether a chemical you are concerned about can be found in a particular product.
- ✿ Contact cleaning product manufacturers to ask them not to use toxic chemicals, like those listed here, in their products.
- ✿ Make your own products using safer ingredients like vinegar and baking soda. To find recipes visit www.womensvoices.org. If scent is important to you, consider using safer alternatives like lemon or orange peel, or fresh herbs to infuse an all-purpose cleaner made with vinegar and water.
- ✿ Use EWG's safe cleaning products database to search for cleaning products that use safer ingredients. Products are given an A, B, C, D or F rating for safety.
- ✿ Find resources and trainings for people who clean for a living from California based IDEPSCA, and New York-based Make the Road New York in both English and Spanish.
- ✿ Look for products with the EPA's Safer Choice label, which lets you know the ingredients have been screened for safety by a 3rd party. Other 3rd party certification programs include GreenSeal and EcoLabel. (Note: while 3rd party certifications can help you find safer products, no certification is perfect.)

For additional studies, resources, and information on chemicals of concern found in cleaning products, view WVE's report, *Beyond the Label*: www.womensvoices.org/beyondthelabel

* *Latinx is used as an alternative to the gender binary inherent to formulations such as Latina/o and is used by and for Latinos who do not identify as either male or female, or more broadly as a gender-neutral term for anyone of Latin-American descent.*

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[3] A Day Late and a Dollar Short: https://ej4all.org/assets/media/documents/Report_ADAYLateAndADollarShort.pdf

[4] Dickens B, Ruiz-Olivo L, Palaguachi D, Jimenez D, Markowitz SB. Occupational Health of New York City Car Wash Workers. *J Occup Environ Med*. 2019 Feb;61(2):e77-e79.

[5] Economic Policy Institute (2020) Domestic Workers Chartbook. May 2020. Available at: <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-of-the-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/>

[6] Saba Waheed, Michele Wong, and Megan Whelan (2020) Profile of Domestic Workers in California. Los Angeles: UCLA Labor Center and California Domestic Workers Coalition, 2020. Available at: <https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Profile-of-Domestic-Workers-in-California.pdf>

[7] Economic Policy Institute (2020) Domestic Workers Chartbook. May 2020. Available at: <https://www.epi.org/publication/domestic-workers-chartbook-a-comprehensive-look-at-the-demographics-wages-benefits-and-poverty-rates-of-the-professionals-who-care-for-our-family-members-and-clean-our-homes/>

[8] Bullard, R; Saha, R; Wright, B. 2007. Toxic Wastes and Race and Twenty 1987-2007: Grassroots Struggles to Dismantle Environmental Racism in the United States. Report for United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries. Available: <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/twart.pdf>

[9] EJ 4 All (2021) Life at the Fenceline: Understanding Cumulative Health Hazards in Environmental Justice Communities. Available at: <https://ej4all.org/life-at-the-fenceline>

[10] "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Perinatal Insurance Coverage," *Obstetrics and Gynecology*. DOI: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000003728