

Press Release No. 24/2009

Press Relations Officer: Martin Ittershagen
PR-staff: Anke Döpke, Dieter Leutert,
Fotini Mavromati, Theresa Pfeifer, Martin Stallmann
Address: Postfach 1406, 06813 Dessau-Roßlau
Telephone: +49 340/21 03-2122, -2827, -2250, -2318, -3927, -2507
E-Mail: pressestelle@uba.de
Internet: www.umweltbundesamt.de



Beware: Not every natural substance in cleansers is healthy or environmentally friendly Action day for sustainable (dish) washing on 10 May 2009

Some 450,000 tonnes of cleansing agents are sold in Germany annually, of which some 250,000 tonnes are dish-washing detergents and another 200,000 tonnes are household cleaners. Manufacturers will sometimes tout their use of natural materials in some products, for example orange oil or citrus oil. However, some natural substances can trigger contact allergies or are harmful to the environment. "What is considered natural is not necessarily particularly good for health and the environment. It is therefore safer to use cleansing agents which have been tested for their effects on health and the environment", says Dr. Thomas Holzmann, Vice President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA), on the occasion of the nation-wide action day for sustainable (dish) washing to be held 10 May 2009.

Many natural plant-based substances, especially essential oils, serve the natural purpose of fending off parasites and micro-organisms. In many cases these substances are harmful to health and not environmentally friendly. One typical example of this problematic situation is the citrus oil sometimes used in cleaning products that also contain lime and citral. Lime is a hazardous substance that is classified as sensitising and hazardous to the environment. It can trigger allergies and is highly toxic for aquatic organisms as well. Citral is a sensitising substance and is known to trigger allergies.

Anyone concerned about cleanliness as well as his own health and the environment should pay mind to the following: good cleaning results with minimum stress on the environment are possible by opting for products that meet stringent requirements in terms of eco-friendliness and health in respect of the materials used. The European eco-label, for one, designates such products, and proof of cleaning performance in an eco-label also provides a guarantee of cleanliness. The EU eco-label is now featured on all-purpose cleaners and sanitary installation cleaners, dish liquid and detergents as well as laundry detergents.

Here are just a few tips on household cleaning:

All-purpose cleaners are suited for nearly any cleaning job and on all surfaces resistant to wiping. They are especially effective in removing grease.

Regular cleaning in bathroom areas with citric acid-based cleaners is more than enough to combat lime and dirt. Disinfectants are generally unnecessary here.

Green thinkers use dish liquid, scouring milk or all-purpose cleaner in the kitchen. Spills and dirt are best removed from stove tops and ovens when the surfaces are still warm. Window washing is just as effective with water and a squirt of dish liquid instead of a special glass cleaner. A squeegee or chamois cloth produce streak-free shine
UBA is a supporter of the annual national action day for sustainable (dish) washing. This year experts from the Agency are educating consumers on the subject of sustainable kitchen and bath cleaning. They will be represented with an information booth at the regional organic farmers market at Lidiceplatz in Dessau-Roßlau on 9 May 2009, and at an information event hosted jointly on 12 May 2009 with the consumers association of Saxony-Anhalt at the Rathauscenter in Dessau-Roßlau.

Information on the national campaign day is available at
www.aktionstag-nachhaltiges-waschen.de.

25 tips on environmentally friendly washing and cleaning are here:
<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/chemikalien/waschmittel/tipps.htm>.

Information on eco-labels for cleansing agents is at:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/chemikalien/waschmittel/zeichen.htm>.

The Federal Environment Agency is glad to answer any further questions about cleansing agents and detergents. Please direct an email to: detergenzien@uba.de.

Dessau-Roßlau, 8 May 2009