

Press Release No. 22/2008

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



The fight against rubbish and stink: advice on ecological spring cleaning

Use cleaning products sparingly – bring broken electrical and electronic devices to community collection points

Spring has sprung, and for many it is an opportunity to clear up at home and bid winter farewell. To those concerned not only about cleanliness but also about our environment, the following advice by Prof. Dr. Andreas Troge, President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA): Use detergents and cleansing agents as indicated. It saves energy, chemicals and water—and is better for health. Lots of chemicals use by no means amounts to a great help, but rather a burden on the environment and the budget. Old defective electrical and electronic devices—lamps, mobile phones, TVs or hi-fi systems—do not belong in the household waste bin. “Consumers must take electronic scrap to their cities’ collection points, and it is completely free of charge. Precious resources contained in the equipment will thus not simply land in the waste bin, but can instead be recycled”, said Troge. Electrical and electronic devices no longer in use contain ever scarcer and valuable precious metals such as gold, indium, and platinum, as well as steel and plastics. Disposing of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) in the household bin has been banned since March 2006 and must instead be brought to community collection points.

All-purpose cleaners are suited for nearly every cleaning job and all wipeable surfaces. Manufacturer advice on use should be followed to the letter so as to avoid overdosage and resulting streaking. The following alternative cleaning agents produce better cleaning results and less strain on the environment:

Scouring agents are a good choice for dirt on scratchproof surfaces. Mechanical cleaning makes it possible to use smaller amounts of strong chemicals that could contaminate water. Especially in bathroom/toilet areas, regular cleaning with citric acid-based detergents is more than sufficient to remove lime and dirt. Disinfectants are generally not required.

Caution is advised when using pipe and drain cleaners. They are usually very caustic and are environmentally hazardous on account of the high content of alkaline ingredients, which results in salinisation of waters. Clogged pipes in the bath or kitchen are better eliminated mechanically by means of a plunger or a wire spiral.

In the kitchen the ecologically-minded make a better choice by opting for dishwashing liquid, alkaline all-purpose cleaners or scouring agents instead of heavy-duty special products for use on stove tops or in ovens. There are good results if the product can soak in for a while and if muscle power is used instead of chemicals when removing spills immediately from a warm stove or oven. Lime practically removes itself when soaked briefly in lemon juice or an citric acid-based cleaning agent.

For window cleaning, a bucket of water with a squirt of dishwashing liquid, vinegar, or ethanol is the answer. A squeegee or chamois cloth will produce streak-free shine.

Upholstery and carpeting can be cleaned ecologically by vacuuming or brushing. Stains can often be removed with a soapy solution or with a little lukewarm detergent used to wash delicates.

Air freshener products should be avoided, since the perfumes in them could cause allergies. Bad smells can often be eliminated by airing rooms briefly.

And what about disposal of waste chemicals? Chemicals and solvents such as turpentine substitute can do great harm to the environment and should therefore not be disposed of through drains or in the waste bin. Any leftovers should be returned to the merchant who sold them, to community collection points, or to a disposal company. WEEE to be brought to collection points includes energy-saving light bulbs and luminescent tubes, for these products contain mercury. Batteries contain cadmium, mercury and lead, and may therefore also not be disposed of with other household waste. Consumers must bring them to specially designated containers and their community's collection point. In the case of batteries containing lithium, such as lithium-ion batteries in cameras or laptop power packs, there is risk of causing small fires or even explosions if disposed of improperly. For safety it is recommended that the battery poles be covered.

More information is available at:

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/abfallwirtschaft/elektrog/index.htm>

<http://www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3057.pdf>

Dessau-Roßlau, 3 April 2008