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Fragrances in laundry detergents and cleaning agents – one can well do without

A nationwide day for sustainable (dish) washing on 10 May 2008

Some 630,000 tonnes of laundry detergent are sold in Germany every year, adding up to nearly eight kilogrammes per person per year. When cleaning and other care products are added, the per capita consumption figure doubles. The majority of laundry detergents and cleaning agents contain fragrances, and there is relatively little knowledge about their impact on human health and the environment. One thing is clear: some fragrant products contain substances that are known to frequently trigger contact allergies or may be questionable to health. “What we find pleasant is not necessarily good for our health and the environment. Manufacturers and merchants of aromatic substances are called upon to promote research aimed at gaining more knowledge about their risks”, said Dr. Thomas Holzmann, Vice President of the Federal Environment Agency, on the occasion of this year’s nationwide day for sustainable (dish) washing on 10 May.

Overall the industry sells about 2,500-3,000 fragrances, 15 of them in volumes of more than 1,000 tonnes. A study done on behalf of the Federal Environment Agency revealed that there are at least a half million people in Germany who are allergic to aromatic substances. What many people do not know is that manufacturers are obliged to label packages if laundry and cleaning products contain one of the 26 fragrances classified as a very strong allergenic in volumes greater than 0.01 percent.

It may be of some comfort to allergy sufferers that fragrance-free products have appeared on the market in the meantime. Another piece of advice: laundry dried outside has an unmistakable pleasant odour—without any fragrances added.

The Federal Environment Agency supports the annual nationwide day for sustainable (dish) washing. This year, experts at the Agency are cooperating with the Consumers’ Association of Saxony-Anhalt at a consumer education event on the topic of fragrances in laundry detergents and cleaning agents. It will be held on 20 May 2008 at the Rathauscenter in Dessau-Roßlau.

More information on the nationwide action day is available at www.aktionstag-nachhaltiges-waschen.de.

The Federal Environment Agency is happy to answer any other questions about laundry detergents and cleaning agents. Please send an e-mail to: detergenzien@uba.de

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