

## What is Fragrance?

Fragrance is a term which refers to any substance or mixture of substances intended to convey a scent or mask an odor. Fragrance can come from both natural sources (plants, flowers, foods) as well as synthetically manufactured chemicals commonly found in scented household products. A manufactured fragrance can be composed of tens to hundreds of individual fragrance chemicals, but it is most often simply listed as the generic term “fragrance.”

## Fragrances in Cleaning Products

Fragrance is a major driver in the marketing of cleaning products, which tend to have relatively simple formulas – often only distinguished from one another by how they smell. In general, these chemicals do not clean, or increase the effectiveness of a product.

For decades, manufacturers have kept the chemical ingredients in fragrances a secret from the public. Only in the last few years has fragrance disclosure become more common, and for the first time we are able to better understand these exposures. As new information has been revealed, we have identified five specific fragrance ingredients of concern that are now commonly found to be used in cleaning products: **Diethyl phthalate**, **Butylphenyl Methylpropional (Lilial)**, **Hexamethylindanopyran (Galaxolide)**, **Tetramethyl acetyloctahydronaphthalenes (OTNE)** and **Hydroxy-isoheptyl 3-cyclohexene carboxaldehyde (HICC or Lyril)**. Of particular note:

- 🚫 Fragrance hides some of the most problematic chemicals used to make cleaning products, including those linked to reproductive harm, aquatic toxicity, allergens and hormone disruption.
- 🚫 Two fragrance chemicals found in cleaning products sold in the United States have been banned for certain use by the European Union, including HICC, a well-known and well documented skin allergen, and **Lilial**, a reproductive toxin, which is used widely in laundry products, air fresheners, multipurpose cleaners, glass cleaners, and carpet deodorizers.
- 🚫 Heavily fragranced brands like Fabuloso, Fragranzia, Suavitel, and Xcelente marketed to the Latinx community commonly contain the fragrance chemical and reproductive toxin **Lilial**.
- 🚫 Synthetic musks, Galaxolide & OTNE, considered toxic to aquatic life, were found in a number of brands, including “green” brands like Mrs. Meyers and Method, both owned by SC Johnson.

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**All of these chemicals pose unnecessary risk, should be avoided, and should be removed entirely or replaced by manufacturers with safer alternatives.**

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## Women are More Impacted by Fragranced Cleaning Products than Men

Because women tend to make the vast majority of household purchasing decisions, especially for cleaning products, they are more often targeted by fragrance marketing. While gender roles and societal expectations have changed over time, a national study showed that women still complete over 70% of the housework in the average home.<sup>1</sup> Women are also much more likely to use cleaning products in the workplace. Unfortunately, women are also more likely than men to experience adverse health effects from exposure to fragrance, and to have fragrance allergies.<sup>2,3</sup> In addition, women are more vulnerable to the potential hormone-disrupting effects of fragrance ingredients, which can affect fertility and pregnancy.

# How Fragrance Harms our Health

We can inhale or absorb toxic fragrance chemicals into our bodies from fragranced products used in our homes and in public spaces. These exposures can have an impact on our health, including:

Skin allergies to fragrance are well documented in scientific literature. 2-11% of the general population experience skin allergies to fragrance.<sup>4,5</sup>

Both asthma and COPD symptoms can be made worse by fragrance exposure.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Neurological impacts such as migraines have been associated with fragrance.<sup>9,10</sup> In the U.S. these types of reactions are quite common. In a national survey, over 34% of respondents in the U.S. reported health problems, such as migraine headaches and respiratory difficulties, in response to exposure to fragranced products.<sup>11</sup>

Reproductive concerns from exposure to certain fragrance chemicals include birth defects, premature birth, decreases in fertility and other effects.<sup>12</sup>

## How Can We Avoid Harmful Fragrance Chemicals?

We need stronger worker protection laws to ensure the safety and health of people who use cleaning products. In addition, manufacturers have much more work to do to establish, document and publicly report the strict safety standards they will apply to determine which chemicals are appropriate to use in products, and which must be replaced with safer alternatives.

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

- ✿ Reduce or eliminate your use of fragranced cleaning products.
- ✿ Read cleaning product labels/go to the product brand website and check whether your favorite cleaning product contains any of the chemicals mentioned above.
- ✿ 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](http://www.womensvoices.org)
- ✿ 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.
- ✿ 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/>
- ✿ 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 studies, references, and information on chemicals of concern found in cleaning products, view WVE's report, *Beyond the Label*: [womensvoices.org/beyondthelabel](http://womensvoices.org/beyondthelabel)