

# Cleaning Products FAQ

Version 1.0: 2024

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## Does PCC have a standard for Cleaning Products?

Yes. PCC has standards for the cleaning products we sell on our shelves as well as guidance for the cleaning products used by our store staff. Our standard for items we sell requires that companies disclose their ingredients for shoppers, focuses on prioritizing plant-based ingredients and minimizing the prevalence of petroleum-derived ingredients, and prohibits several key harmful substances, such as artificial petroleum-derived fragrances and synthetic antimicrobials. Under our standard, we also do not accept products that are classified as known carcinogens by leading health and environmental agencies, such as the National Toxicology Program. For products used by store staff or janitorial services in our stores, we prioritize items that don't contain harmful ingredients like artificial dyes and fragrances, and quaternary ammonium compounds whenever possible.

PCC's first official cleaning product standard was released at the start of 2024; however, we have focused on safe alternatives for many years. PCC's merchandisers used requirements and prohibited ingredient lists for health and body care items as guidance in making choices on what to sell. We've also screened for brands that had certifications like organic or biobased, and prioritized items that had ingredient panels on the packaging itself. As a result, PCC has held a high bar for sustainability and ingredient safety in this category.

## Do all cleaning products list their ingredients?

No. Companies are not required to disclose the ingredients of cleaning products. PCC works with companies who lead the cleaning industry by voluntarily disclosing ingredients. Consumer protection groups have worked hard to push for greater transparency at the state level and a handful of states have already passed legislation that requires companies to disclose cleaning product ingredients. PCC has advocated for such protections in Washington State as well.

## Are all laundry and cleaning products at PCC fragrance free?

All the laundry and cleaning products sold at PCC must be free of artificial petroleum-derived fragrances. We allow naturally derived fragrances, such as essential oils, in our products as many customers appreciate having scented laundry or dish soap. We do strive to offer fragrance free options in all our cleaning product categories if they are available.

## Why does PCC not sell bleach and ammonia products?

Bleach and ammonia have become staples in home cleaning cabinets, but they are extremely dangerous substances that must be handled carefully. Both are irritating to the eyes and respiratory system, and when used improperly can create poisonous compounds. This is especially true for bleach, which should never be mixed with ammonia or anything other than water. Ammonia can trigger asthma attacks and is caustic to the skin and respiratory tract. Excessive exposure may also lead to liver or kidney damage. At PCC, we focus on selling effective home cleaning products that are better for the environment and human health, and, as the natural cleaning

industry evolves, there are now many alternatives to these powerful cleaning agents. As a precautionary measure, we avoid selling bleach and ammonia and any products that contain those substances.

## **Are more “natural” cleaning products really as effective as conventional ones?**

Yes, more natural or green cleaning products can be just as effective as conventional products that contain powerful sanitizing and disinfecting chemicals. Less toxic cleaners may require a little more elbow grease or time to sit on a surface to be most effective. However, at PCC, we believe this is a reasonable tradeoff where human and environmental health is concerned.

## **I’ve read that PVA used in laundry strips creates microplastics during use. Is that true?**

Polyvinyl Alcohol (PVA or PVOH) is a substance used to create detergent pods or laundry detergent sheets. PVA is a polymer, which means it’s a material made of many repeating subunits, and in the case of PVA, those subunits are vinyl alcohol.<sup>1</sup> It’s designed to dissolve in water, making it an ideal carrier for active ingredients and a critical component in developing concentrated cleaning products, which use less water and packaging. There has been controversy around PVA, with a group of organizations (and one cleaning company) claiming that it doesn’t fully degrade but breaks down into microplastics. There is much conflicting information available online, however, the European Chemicals Agency, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and the independent Nordic Ecolabelling group, all concur that the “grade” or type PVA (the most soluble one) used in dissolvable laundry pods and sheets is highly biodegradable and does not contribute to the issue of microplastics. PVA breaks down into base chemicals, but the evidence does not seem to indicate that it breaks down into insoluble synthetic polymers, which is the basic definition of a microplastic. Since PVA has many different uses, some studies have found traces of it in the environment, but thus far, those sources cannot be traced back to laundry sheets or detergent pods.<sup>i</sup>

In early 2023, the EPA received a petition to conduct more research into the biodegradability and safety of PVA, as it is permitted under the EPA Safer Choice’s program. The EPA denied the request and published its explanation in the [Federal Register](#). Broadly, the EPA denied their petition on the grounds that the petitioners did not provide a reasonable explanation for why they felt the existing data on PVA was insufficient and failed to acknowledge existing studies and data related to PVA degradation and safety.

Given the current evidence on PVA degradation and approval under the EPA, along with other regulatory bodies, PCC accepts products that use water-soluble PVA. We will continue to track emerging science and data on PVA and will reevaluate our position if appropriate and necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to understand that despite the similarity in name, it should be clarified that PVA is not the same as the plastic known as PVC, which is made from the toxic gas vinyl chloride. Additionally, the term vinyl refers to a specific group of molecules when used in the context of organic chemistry. While the term has become associated with records, flooring, and wallpaper, among other consumer goods, those materials are generally made from polyvinyl chloride, which is chemically different than polyvinyl alcohol, and its subunits, vinyl alcohol.

## What is PCC doing to reduce packaging and use of plastic in cleaning products?

Reducing packaging, especially plastic, is an important and challenging problem in the cleaning products industry. While many items are still commonly found in plastic bottles, we are actively working on exploring products with alternative packaging or minimal packaging, such as laundry strips and refillable containers.

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<sup>i</sup> Dominic Byrne et al., “Biodegradability of Polyvinyl Alcohol Based Film Used for Liquid Detergent Capsules: Biologische Abbaubarkeit Der Für Flüssigwaschmittelkapseln Verwendeten Folie Auf Polyvinylalkoholbasis.,” *Tenside Surfactants Detergents* 58, no. 2 (March 1, 2021): 88–96, <https://doi.org/10.1515/tsd-2020-2326>.