

# Hung Out To Dry: Getting Toxics Out of Dry Cleaning

## Take action to get toxics out of dry cleaning!

The California Air Resources Board (ARB) issued a crucial public health decision when it voted in May 2006 to phase out the use of perchloroethylene (perc) in dry cleaning.

Now, to further protect the safety of all Californians, the Coalition for Clean Air is asking the Air Board to include three vital measures to its perc phase-out proposal:

- Phase out perc in 10 years, instead of 15 years;
- Also phase out hydrocarbon solvent systems because they create smog;
- And, require the faster phaseout, by 2010, of all perc dry cleaners located within 300 yards of residential areas, schools, medical facilities and other sensitive areas.

To send a message to the ARB, go to :  
[www.coalitionforcleanair.org](http://www.coalitionforcleanair.org)



"Because perc is strong enough to remove tough stains, it is also very tough on your skin. Our skin was being hurt as a result of being in direct contact with this chemical. It was red, itchy and sometimes it will even bleed."

Lawrence Lee  
Professional Wet Cleaner  
Pomona, CA

When customers pick up their garments at the local dry cleaner they expect their clothes to be free of stains. What consumers don't expect is exposure to a cancer-causing chemical when entering the store or wearing their clothes.

The dry cleaning industry uses a toxic chemical called perchloroethylene, which is also known as "perc." In the late 1970s, increasing evidence demonstrated that perc used by professional dry cleaners was harmful to human health and the environment. Today, this toxic chemical contaminates our air and water and endangers workers and families exposed to it daily.

### • Perc causes cancer and other health problems:

California Proposition 65 has classified perc as a chemical known to cause cancer.<sup>1</sup> Perc can also cause: cracking or irritation of the skin; irritation of the eyes, nose, mouth, throat and lungs; burns; headaches; dizziness; nausea; fainting; coughing; fluid buildup in the lungs; and damage to the central nervous system, kidneys, liver, and reproductive system.<sup>2</sup>

### • Perc contaminates the air we breathe and the water we drink:

According to US Environmental Protection Agency data, perc is one of the top 10 most toxic air contaminants in California.<sup>3</sup> Statewide, the dry cleaning industry emits 222,000 gallons, or about 3 million pounds of perc per year.<sup>4</sup> Based on an estimate from perc manufacturers, about 80 percent of the perc sold in California is used for dry cleaning operations.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, perc is estimated to have contaminated 1 in 10 public drinking wells in California.<sup>6</sup> Typically, cleaners are neighborhood based and located in relatively populated areas. This harmful solvent is used by over 85% of dry cleaners in California, and it harms shop employees.<sup>7,8</sup>

### Perc Use is an Environmental Justice Issue

Small business owners and employees are on the front lines of exposure to this toxic substance. Korean-Americans represent a large portion of professional cleaners in the United States, especially prevalent in large cities like Los Angeles and Chicago. In California, as many as 50% of the shops are owned or operated by Korean-Americans.<sup>9</sup> Also, in southern California, Latinos, Asians and other minorities are a significant percentage of the workforce in the dry cleaning industry.

It is crucial that these communities have language-appropriate resources available to them so that they are able to understand the occupational hazards of perc exposure and how to access state grants to phase out the use of the chemical.

Continued ►

# Hung Out To Dry: Continued

## Safer Options Are Affordable and Effective

Effective non-toxic alternatives, such as wet cleaning and liquid carbon dioxide, will help remove the most serious health hazard in the clothes cleaning industry.<sup>10</sup>



Alternatives also will offer relief to:

- Small businesses burdened by regulation of their hazardous chemical use
- Workers with illnesses from daily perc exposure
- Customers worried about the toxics they bring home with their dry cleaning

To find non-toxic cleaners in California, please visit:  
[www.coalitionforcleanair.org/news-fact-sheets-Hung-Out-to-Dry-Cleaning-Up-Dry-Cleaning.html](http://www.coalitionforcleanair.org/news-fact-sheets-Hung-Out-to-Dry-Cleaning-Up-Dry-Cleaning.html)

“The International Fabricare Institute, calls perchloroethylene ‘fabulous,’ for its ability to remove stains ‘without damaging fabric.’ It must be a peculiar luxury to put clothing ahead of people’s health and safety. As the son and grandson of drycleaners I see nothing fabulous about perc. My father died in 1993 of kidney cancer linked to perchloroethylene exposure.

Will multi-billion dollar chemical corporations and the trade associations they support delude another generation of mom-and-pop dry cleaners into complacency, illness and death?”

Scott Vineberg  
of Santa Monica, CA  
Author of a Letter to the Editor  
published in the LA Times  
October 21, 2002.

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<sup>1</sup>The Office of Environmental Health Hazards Assessment (OEHHA) list of chemicals in the State of California known to cause cancer or reproductive toxicity can be viewed at: [http://www.oehha.ca.gov/prop65/prop65\\_list/files/P65single20306.pdf](http://www.oehha.ca.gov/prop65/prop65_list/files/P65single20306.pdf). Last updated Feb. 3, 2006.

<sup>2</sup>California Air Resources Board. 2006. Staff Report: Initial Statement of Reasons for the Proposed Amendments to the Control Measure for Perchloroethylene Dry Cleaning Operations, pg. IV-6.

<sup>3</sup>Data released in February 2006. EPA 1999 National-Scale Air Toxics Assessment: 1999 Data Tables, County-Level Pollutant-Specific Cancer and Noncancer (Respiratory and Neurological) Risk Spreadsheet, last viewed 4/13/06: <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/nata1999/countyxls/feb06pollutant.xls>.

<sup>4</sup>California Air Resources Board. 2006. Staff Report: Initial Statement of Reasons for the Proposed Amendments to the Control Measure for Perchloroethylene Dry Cleaning Operations, pg. ES-7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid,pg. ES-7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. pg. VIII-2.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. pg. ES-4.

<sup>8</sup>Sinsheimer, et al., 2002. Integrating Pollution Prevention Technology into Public Policy: The Case of Professional Wet Cleaning. *Environmental Science & Technology*. 32:8, p. 1650.

<sup>9</sup>Malloy, Timothy and Sinsheimer, Peter. 2001. Pollution Prevention as a Regulatory Tool in California: Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges. Los Angeles: Pollution Prevention, Education and Research Center, pg. 4. Additionally, in the Los Angeles area, Korean-Americans own an estimated 50 percent of garment care shops. South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD). 2002. Draft Staff Report: Proposed Amendment Rule 1421 – Control of Perchloroethylene Emissions from Dry Cleaning Systems. Diamond Bar, CA. September, pg. ES-2.

<sup>10</sup>Malloy, Timothy and Sinsheimer, Peter. 2001. Pollution Prevention as a Regulatory Tool in California: Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges. Los Angeles: Pollution Prevention, Education and Research Center, pg. 3. Star, Anthony and Ewing Sylvia. 2000. *Real World Wetcleaning: A Study of three established wetcleaning shops, introduction.*