

February 4, 2007. [0 comments](#). Topic: [Environment](#)

A Greener and Safer Future for Dry Cleaners Because California Acted

Recent state decision will help protect laundry workers and consumers. Safe clothes cleaning choices that don't use toxic solvents are already popular.

There's good news for people who want to keep cancer-causing chemicals out of the clothes they have dry cleaned.

California will now be the first state in the nation to ban perchloroethylene (also known as "perc") by 2023. This solvent is used by most dry cleaners and is a top water and air contaminant in California.

The other good news is that some dry cleaners have already quit using perc and are offering eco-friendly and affordable alternatives like professional wet cleaning.



Peter Jung of Thousand Oaks, Calif., was skeptical at first about switching from perc to wet cleaning. But his landlord did not want to rent to a tenant who used perc, so Jung made the switch almost a year ago.

Immediately, Jung said, he started saving money on utility bills: 50% on electricity and 30% on natural gas. "I also have lower water consumption," he added, "and I save money because I don't have to buy solvent, pay for waste removal and pay government permit fees."

One of the biggest advantages, Jung said, is that his Plaza Cleaners business is doing well and his customers have noticed their clothes don't smell like solvent anymore. "It has worked for my business," he said.

The recent decision by the state Air Resources Board to phase out perc will be a "green" boost to the entire garment care industry – a trend being watched by states across the country.

In Southern California, there has already been a shift in the garment care industry away from perc, driven by a 2002 local air quality regulation that echoes the state in phasing out perc. Air officials have also offered grants to cleaners like Jung to help lower the cost of switching out equipment and retraining employees.

But customers and cleaners should not wait until 2023 to eliminate perc from their clothes.

Perc isn't dry and it doesn't smell laundry fresh. It's a carcinogen that is often released into our neighborhoods because cleaners are frequently located next to schools, medical clinics and homes.

It's a toxic chemical that has been shown to damage the central nervous system, kidneys, liver and reproductive organs. It irritates the skin, nose and eyes. And you might get a

headache, feel nauseous, or faint.

Laundry owners and workers are at greatest risk, and most dry cleaners are small, family businesses with limited access to health care. In Southern California, Latinos, Asians and other minorities are a significant percentage of the workforce in the dry cleaning industry, with Korean-Americans owning or operating as many as half the cleaners.

Jung said he never thought of himself as an environmental activist, but "I do see that the world is changing because of pollution. I notice that things like global warming are harming people and the world we live in."

Although he is just one cleaner, Jung recently told the Air Board that it was important to think about the thousands of dry cleaners in California and how their perc use hurts our environment.

"We have to do something," he pleaded. "Our generation will survive with this pollution but what about our children and our grandchildren? We need to take responsibility for a better environment and for our future."

(To find a greener cleaner go to: www.coalitionforcleanair.org)

Luis Cabrales is a campaign associate for the Coalition for Clean Air. He is also a board member and co-founder of Residents of Pico Rivera for Environmental Justice, a community-based, environmental justice organization.



Comments

© 2006 California Progress Report [Our copyright and fair use policy](#).
Powered by [Mandate Media](#). Logo design by [Jane Norling](#).