

# Smart choices

The products you buy and use have an effect on the environment.

By Brandi Schlossberg

As far-fetched as it may sound, personal acts as ordinary as cleaning the house or buying a bathrobe may have a major effect on the environment, especially as consumer choices add up.

From detergent and paper towels to hair dye and tampons — and nearly every item in between — where we spend our money impacts not only the planet, but also personal health and the national marketplace.

If more consumers begin to choose earth-friendly products, the law of supply and demand would dictate that more companies begin to manufacture such items. In turn, these green goods would cause far less damage to the planet — and to our bodies.

“We all want to live long, healthy lives, and using products with

plant-based ingredients instead of petroleum-based ingredients is healthier for us, as well as the planet,” said Holly Hodgdon, co-owner of Reno’s Tangerine Salon and Spa, which offers Aveda’s plant-based line of products.

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Hair dye, for example, typically contains ingredients derived from petroleum and includes chemicals that could cause skin, eye or respiratory irritation. The ingredients in hair dye also have been linked to cancer and are known to include lead acetate, according to a report by the Washington Toxics Coalition.

“The bottom line is this: Petroleum-based hair dyes may be a risk to your health and are non-renewable for the environment,” Hodgdon said.

The same drawbacks that apply to hair dye extend to most other mainstream personal and household goods — ingredients that come from non-renewable resources, potentially harmful effects on human health and byproducts that place further strain on the planet.

According to the National Institutes of Health’s household products database, the majority of household cleaners do contain petroleum-based ingredients. These products also often include optical brighteners, which are toxic to water life and difficult to break down, as well as phosphates, which cause




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algae blooms in lakes and ponds that suffocate plants and animals.

“If you do not want to foul the water in the local area, then using cleaners that break down naturally and are not based on petrochemicals is a good choice,” said Philip Moore, sustainable consumption issue chair for the Toiyabe Chapter of the Sierra Club.

Beyond cleaning products and

cosmetics, the textiles we purchase also impact our world. Growing non-organic cotton, for example, uses 25 percent of the world’s insecticide supply and 10 percent of the world’s pesticides, according to the Soil Association.

“By researching these products, each of us can make more educated and conscious decisions about our purchases,” Moore said. 

## CLEAN UP YOUR ACT

- 1 If every household in the U.S. replaced one 48-ounce box of petroleum-based powder laundry detergent with a vegetable-based product, we could save 96,000 barrels of oil, enough to heat and cool 5,500 U.S. homes for a year.
- 2 If every household in the U.S. replaced just one 32-ounce bottle of shower cleaner containing bleach with a hydrogen-peroxide-based shower cleaner, we could prevent 1 million pounds of chlorine from entering our environment.
- 3 If every household in the U.S. replaced just one box of 85-sheet virgin-fiber facial tissues with 100 percent recycled ones, we could save 280,000 trees.

Source: *Seventh Generation*