

Consumer Alert

Dry cleaning Services Misleadingly Branded as Natural and Organic



Beware of dry cleaners making claims about dry cleaning your clothes using “organic” or “natural” methods. Marketing claims for dry cleaning are not regulated like food claims. The National Cleaners Association, a dry cleaning industry trade group, says some operators are using these terms in blatantly misleading ways.

What is organic dry cleaning?

When a food product has an FDA-regulated “organic” label, consumers can trust that no harmful chemicals were used in its manufacture. But “organic” means something very different when it describes the chemicals used in dry cleaning.

In dry cleaning, “organic” only means that the chemicals used to clean clothes are structured on a chain of carbon, the element found in all organic compounds. Gasoline is organic, and so are most of the petrochemical solvents used by the dry cleaning industry for the last 150 years.

Dry cleaners marketing “organic” cleaning methods are technically accurate but socially irresponsible. They are counting on you not to understand the difference between a chemical-free “organic” peach and a petroleum-based “organic” dry cleaning chemical.

The dangers of “organic” cleaning methods

If your cleaner claims to be using “organic” methods to clean your clothes, they are using either perchloroethylene, also known as PCE or perc, or petroleum (hydrocarbon) solvent, often marketed under the brand names DF2000 or EcoSolv.

Perc is considered by the EPA to be an air and water toxin and dangerous to human health. Exposure can lead to increased risk of cancer, reduced fertility and eye, nose and throat irritation. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health estimates that 85% of dry cleaners still use this 1940’s era solvent.

Many dry cleaners also use hydrocarbon solvents. According to Judith S. Schreiber, chief scientist for the New York State attorney general’s Environmental Protection Bureau, hydrocarbons are “a cleaned up version of gasoline” and only slightly less toxic than perc. Hydrocarbon solvents are classified

by the EPA as VOCs (volatile organic compounds), they are likely contributors to smog formation. They are also listed by the EPA as neurotoxins and skin and eye irritants for workers.

Environmentally safe dry cleaning methods

- ✓ **CO2 Cleaning.** Converts CO2 gas under extremely high pressure to a liquid. Avoid CO2 cleaners using Solvair systems, which use glycol-ether during the wash cycle. Glycol-ethers are a family of VOC chemicals used in antifreeze and household cleaning products.

- ✓ **GreenEarth.** Uses liquid silicone, essentially liquefied sand. Clear, odor-less and non-toxic, silicone degrades to sand and trace amounts of water and CO2 when released to the environment. Excellent fabricare benefits.



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CLEANING

- ✓ **Professional Wet Cleaning.** Uses water like home washing machines. Be sure to inquire if 100% of dry cleaning uses this method and whether detergents and pre-spotting agents have toxic or VOC properties. Wet cleaning machines drain directly into the city water system.



Caution about Certified Environmental Dry Cleaners

Any dry cleaner, even a perc cleaner, can hang up a “Certified Environmental Dry Cleaner” sign if they pass a test certifying they have the knowledge and ability to maintain their facility in an environmentally responsible way. Do not rely on signs in the window. Ask your dry cleaner to tell you exactly what process is being used.

More information

www.findco2.com

www.greenearthcleaning.com

www.professionalwetcleaning.com