



# Extension News Column

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**Date:** Dec. 20, 2011  
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**From:** Roxie Dinstel  
**Re:** Regular CES column to run Tuesday, Dec. 27, on Our Town page

## **Additional**

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A cleaner home may be high up on your list of priorities for the new year. You may be trying to keep your house clean, but are also concerned about how the cleaners and the bottles they come in affect our environment. The American Cleaning Institute, formerly the Soap and Detergent Association, offers hints on how to clean while being aware of sustainable practices.

One area where each of us can make a positive contribution is in the way we purchase, use and dispose of cleaning products. The following steps are designed to help you make the best decisions about cleaning products for your family, your community and the environment.

- Before you buy, think about the cleaning job at hand, read product labels carefully and choose the product that is best for your job. Be sure to buy only what you can use.
- Before you use, read the label and follow directions for proper use and follow all safety precautions. Use the recommended amount; more is not necessarily better.
- After you use, read the label and follow directions for proper storage. Keep lid tightly closed and if there is a child-resistant closure, use it. Keep product in the original container with readable label. If you have more than you can use, share any product you can't use with a friend or neighbor.
- If you must dispose of a product, follow label directions. If there are no directions, think about how you use the product. If it mixes with water, it's water soluble. Most liquid, gel and powder water-soluble household cleaning products can be disposed of down the drain, just like you use them. Most solid products can be placed in the trash. For other products, such as oven cleaners, drain openers and furniture polishes, call the manufacturer's toll-free number for disposal instructions.
- When you are disposing of cleaning products, flush the container with water and be sure not to mix products. Chlorine and ammonia make for a deadly gas when mixed. Dispose of powders in small quantities at a time. This will keep them from

forming lumps in the drain pipe.

- Disposing of household hazardous waste (HHW) is costly. In general, HHW costs 10–15 times more to dispose of than nonhazardous municipal waste. If you're disposing of nonhazardous materials in this way, it may affect our tax dollars.
- Water-soluble household cleaning products usually do not fall into the HHW category because they go safely down the drain and into the trash. So, think before you treat them as HHW — you'll be saving all of us money.
- Start out right by cutting down on trash at the source. We all want to conserve resources and keep waste to a minimum. It's called waste reduction — cutting down on excess products and their packages at the source.

The soap and detergent industry has been working hard to conserve resources and reduce waste. In the last few years, we've seen innovations such as concentrated products in smaller packages, combination products (providing two functions in one product), refillable containers, and using recycled materials to make new containers. In fact, the industry has become one of the biggest purchasers of recycled plastics, giving new life to the plastics you recycle.

By buying concentrated products, refills or containers made from recycled materials, and by recycling your used containers, we're keeping excess trash out of landfills.

“Thinking Green” is a daily journey! By making informed decisions before, during and after product use, you're on your way to doing the right thing for yourself and your community. And remember, the key to smart use and disposal is reading the label. It's the single most important thing you can do to make the right decisions.

**Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at [rrdinstel@alaska.edu](mailto:rrdinstel@alaska.edu) or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.**