

Oh,  
what a  
waste!

the house

## Alternatives to common household toxics

Missoula City-County Health Department  
Missoula Valley Water Quality District  
Missoula Wastewater Treatment Plant

Thanks to MSU Extension Service and Greenpeace  
for the information on alternatives

### KITCHEN

#### All purpose cleaner:

- 2 tsp. borax
- 1 tsp. soap
- 1 qt. water

Mix together and store in a spray bottle.

#### Scouring powder:

- 1 part soap
- 1 part borax, baking soda or table salt.

Combine and scrub surface with a sponge or a firm-bristled brush. Change proportions if needed.

#### Oven cleaner:

- ◆ Avoid overfilling pans.
- ◆ Scrape up spills as soon as food is cool enough to handle.
- ◆ Put a cookie sheet on the bottom rack when baking.

#### *When clean up is needed:*

Use steel wool and washing soda with a small amount of water.

#### *Last resort:*

Use 1/2 cup ammonia dissolved in 1 gal. water for scrubbing; provide plenty of ventilation.

### LIVINGROOM

#### Metal cleaners and polishes:

##### Aluminum

Dip a soft, damp cloth in lemon juice and rinse with warm water, or soak overnight in a mixture of vinegar and water. Rub metal, then rinse and polish with a dry cloth.

##### Brass

Mix equal parts of salt and flour with a little vinegar, then rub with a damp cloth. Rinse polish with dry cloth.

##### Copper

Rub with lemon juice and salt or hot vinegar and salt. Rinse and polish with dry cloth.

##### Gold

Wash in lukewarm, soapy water. Dry and polish with a chamois cloth.

##### Silver

Rub with a paste of baking soda and water. Rinse and polish with a dry cloth. Or soak silver in 1 quart of water with 1 tsp. baking soda, 1 tsp. salt and a piece of aluminum foil.

# ALTERNATIVES

## BATHROOM

### Disinfectant:

1/4 cup borax  
1/2 gallon hot water

- ◆ Keeping surfaces clean and dry reduces the need for disinfectants.

### Tub and Tile:

Use undiluted vinegar to loosen lime deposits.

### Drain cleaner:

- ◆ Never pour grease down the drain.
- ◆ Use a drain sieve or hair trap and clean regularly.

#### *Once a week maintenance:*

Plug overflow drain with a wet rag, pour 1/4 cup baking soda down the drain, follow with 1/2 cup vinegar. Close the drain until the fizzing stops. Flush with 1 gallon of boiling water.

#### *Slow or stopped drains:*

Use a plumber's snake OR pour two handfuls of salt down drain, followed by boiling water OR plug overflow drain, dissolve 1 lb. washing soda in 3 gal. boiling water, pour down the drain and use a plunger with a good seal.

# ALTERNATIVES

## DININGROOM

### Glass and window cleaner:

#### *For routine cleaning:*

3 Tbsp. vinegar  
1 quart warm water

#### *For dirty windows:*

First wash with warm soapy water, then use vinegar and water mixture described above.

### Carpets:

2 parts cornmeal  
1 part borax

Sprinkle liberally on carpet, leave for 1 hour, then vacuum.

#### *For tougher stains:*

Repeatedly blot with vinegar in soapy water.

#### *For red wine spills:*

Blot with white wine and warm, soapy water.

#### *To deodorize:*

Sprinkle carpet with baking powder, then vacuum.

### Furniture polish:

#### *Unwaxed wood*

1 tsp. lemon oil  
1 pint mineral oil

Apply with soft cloth. Buff hard with a clean cloth until smooth and dry.

# ALTERNATIVES

Why should you avoid certain household chemicals?

## SOLVENTS

Many household cleaners contain solvents - liquids (usually) capable of dissolving other substances. Not all solvents are bad: for instance, water is a common solvent.

However, chemists have altered the molecular structure of some solvents by adding chlorine (or other halogens). These "super solvents" are very good at getting grime out of clothes, carpets and upholstery, but they are hard to get rid of.

Once a chlorinated solvent enters the environment, it tends to stick around. And, unfortunately, even low concentrations are toxic to humans and other living things.

Common household products which contain chlorinated solvents are rug cleaners, spot removers, paint strippers, brake cleaners, engine degreasers, aerosols and dry cleaning fluid.

Note: Not all the cleaners for which alternatives are provided in this pamphlet contain chlorinated solvents. When buying commercial products, avoid those with "chloro-" in the ingredients list.

*The Health Department, Water Quality District and Wastewater Treatment Plant do not make any warranty, expressed or implied, or assume any responsibility for the accuracy, completeness or usefulness of any of the suggestions listed in this pamphlet.*