

HOUSEHOLD AND PERSONAL CLEANING ALTERNATIVES THE PSLI ENVIRO-CHALLENGE

Today, consumers are often obsessed with cleanliness. Many rural home and cottage owners follow this trend and yet seldom take the time to consider the damage that they may be causing to themselves, their septic systems and the surrounding environment.

Septic systems require bacteria to function properly. Many of our household cleaners, including laundry and dishwasher detergents, often contain phosphates and other harmful chemicals that are not only irritating, toxic and carcinogenic to humans; they also cut down a septic system's ability to function properly and are devastating to our lake environment.

Even products that are advertised as healthy, such as antibacterial soaps, often kill the crucial bacteria we need in our septic systems. Groundwater run-off also contributes to our lake water quality. If we continually bombard lakefront septic systems with these products, they will eventually make their way into our lake water and damage both the environment and water quality.

So what can you do as a conscientious rural property owner? Consider the alternatives.

While most "green" or environmentally friendly cleaning products tend to cost slightly more, using them will ensure that we continue to enjoy a healthy rural environment at the lake for many years to come.

Consider what you may be putting into your septic system. Besides the obvious fecal matter, there are laundry and dishwasher detergents, dish and hand soaps, shampoo, conditioners, body washes, toothpaste, mouthwash, household disinfectants and cleaners, to name just a few. You'd be surprised to see what is actually in these products. Carefully check all labels on both household and personal cleaning products. Chances are if they contain anything you can't pronounce, it probably isn't good for you or the environment.

Cleaning products come in all shapes and sizes, and most of them contain one or more chemicals that are harmful. A few to be on the look out for:

- Sodium hypochlorite, used in chlorine bleach, can cause lung and eye irritation.
- Formaldehyde, a preservative in many household products, is a suspected human carcinogen, and is a strong irritant to eyes, throat, skin and lungs.
- Spot removers and carpet cleaners can contain perchloroethylene, an animal carcinogen, and suspected human carcinogen.
- Phenol and cresol, found in disinfectants, have been linked to diarrhea, fainting, and kidney and liver damage.
- Long-term exposure to certain metal polishes can cause damage to the nervous system, skin, kidneys and eyes.

Anyone suffering from Asthma should also be extremely careful of what cleaning products are used throughout the house.

Less toxic alternatives can be found at organic foods stores, and even some conventional supermarkets, you just have to take the time to find them. Citrus-based cleaners are very effective, as well as environmentally friendly. Made with orange peels, these products are non-toxic, petroleum-free, and biodegradable. Natural acids, such as vinegar and lemon juice, are good at cutting grease, and when mixed with water, ordinary baking soda can usually do the same job as a commercial can of cleanser or all-purpose spray – without leaving harmful chemicals behind.

Some companies now specialize in Natural Products. They offer a full line of household products for both cleaning and personal use that are phosphate and chemical free; healthy for you and the environment.

There are several **local stores** that carry “green” alternatives. **Loblaws** carries two brands of environmentally friendly products: *Nature Clean* and *Simply Clean* (both Canadian). *Nature Clean* products are chlorine free, hypoallergenic, cruelty free, septic safe and biodegradable. Products include: laundry detergent \$9.29 / 2 kg; dishwasher soap and/or gel: soap is \$8.99 / 1.8 L; oven cleaner, bleach, and fabric softener. There are various cleaning products for tiles, floors, sinks and tubs. Products are available at Loblaws in the Natural Food/Health section under cleaning products. *Natures Care* with stores on **Bank Street**, **Beechwood Avenue**, **Robertson Road** and **Merivale Road**, also sells both lines of household products. *Thanks to Dawn Lucas of Lake Rhéaume for her research!*

Most health food companies in **Ottawa**, such as **Kardish**, **Natural Food Pantry**, **Rainbow Foods** and **The Wheat Berry**, as well as **Gagné en Santé in Gatineau**, sell natural household cleaners and laundry detergents; brands include: *Bio Vert*, *Eco Choice*, *7th Generation*, *Nature Clean* and *Simply Clean*, to name a few. In **Gatineau**, there are two health food stores that carry *Nature Clean* products and other ecological products as well: **Gagné en Santé at 224 Bellehumeur Street** is one, and **La boîte à grains** is the other. Contact : **Pierre Ménard**, Proprietor, **581 St. Joseph Blvd.**, Hull, 771-3000; or **325 Gréber Blvd.**, **Gatineau**, 243-3002. (Pierre Ménard also has a cottage on Bataille.)

There are also specialty companies that offer their products through the **Internet**: *Nature Clean* is one available at <http://www.shopnontoxic.com> *Bi-O-Kleen* at www.bi-o-kleen.com, or by calling 1-800-477-0188 in Vancouver.

Another Internet or telephone order company is **Melaleuca – The wellness company**. They offer an alternative for almost every cleaning and personal hygiene product on the market with their *Eco-Sense* product line. All their products are biodegradable and made of natural products. Orders must be placed by telephone or on the Internet; products are delivered by mail, generally within a week.

Last year, as full time residents, my husband and I took the challenge and completely converted our lakefront home over to Melaleuca products. We have never looked back. The products are a bit more expensive, as they have to be ordered by mail, but often prices may be reduced if groups of consumers band together when ordering. However, in the long-run, we found that the quality was superior, quantities lasted longer, and the products are, in most cases, water-soluble. They also work every bit as well as the top brand names we are so accustomed to using. In many cases, they work better, as was the case with the shampoo, laundry and dishwashing detergents.

Anyone interested in obtaining more information on Melaleuca products may visit their website at www.melaleuca.com, or call their local marketing representative (Perkins area) Lisette Tremblay at 819 671-0952, 32 Stanyar Road, Val-des-Monts, J8N 7B6. She can provide you with a free in-home / cottage demonstration and product explanation if you let her know that you got her name through the PSLN Newsletter.

This past year, the Municipality investigated all septic systems in the area. Thankfully, only a few property owners were forced to resolve problematic systems and undertake repairs or replacements, wherever necessary. We need to ensure that area cottagers and homeowners understand the importance of ensuring the proper function of septic systems to protect our surrounding environment.

So PSLN members, ***take the PSLN Enviro-Challenge and go “environmentally friendly at the lake”***. Help keep yourself and your environment healthy, your lake water clean, and your septic system happy. We all need to do our part!

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Suggested related reading...

CBC Marketplace – If you can’t pronounce it, should you use it?
http://www.health-report.co.uk/toxic_household_chemicals.htm

CBC Marketplace – Household cleaners – A toxic brew
<http://www.cbc.ca/consumers/market/files/home/cleaners>

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