

ACCESSING SAFETY KNOWLEDGE (ASK) SHEET: *HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS*



Are you familiar with the chemicals in your home?

Some of the common chemicals found in your home shouldn't be mixed together. It's one thing to say, "don't mix bleach with ammonia," but it's not always easy to know what products contain these two chemicals. Here are some household products you may have around the home that shouldn't be combined.

- **Bleach with Acid Toilet Bowl Cleaners:** This mixture can result in toxic, potentially deadly fumes.
- **Bleach with Vinegar:** Vinegar is a type of acid. Toxic chlorine vapor is produced. Don't mix chlorine bleach with any acid.
- **Bleach with Ammonia:** This is toxic. Potentially lethal vapors are produced. The main danger comes from chloramine vapors.
- **Different Brands of One Type of Product:** Don't mix different cleaners together. They may react violently, produce toxins, or become ineffective.
- **Highly Alkaline Products with Highly Acidic Products:** Acids and bases (alkalis) can react violently, presenting a splash hazard. Acids and bases are caustic and may cause chemical burns.
- **Certain Disinfectants with Detergents:** Don't mix disinfectants with 'quaternary ammonia' listed as an ingredient with a detergent. The effectiveness of the disinfectant may be neutralized.

Bottom Line

Chlorine bleach is sometimes called "sodium hypochlorite" or "hypochlorite." You will encounter it in chlorine bleach, automatic dishwashing detergents, chlorinated disinfectants and cleaners, chlorinated scouring powder, mildew removers, and toilet bowl cleaners. Do not mix products together. Do not mix them with ammonia or vinegar.

Read the labels of products in your home and following instructions for proper use. Many containers will state the most common dangers from interaction with other products.

Look for red flags. When selecting products for the home, read the label carefully. Look for "signal words" that indicate high risk. Signal words to watch out for include "caution," "warning," "danger", and "poison." Trust us, manufacturers don't put these terms on the label because they are benevolent. These are legal obligations based of FDA regulations and subsequent liability. Warning, danger and poison are the biggest red flags. Caution is a bit of a gray area and can simply address common sense recommendations, as in: "Caution - do not set this product on fire and leave the room." Cautions are usually less insidious, though still worth noting.

Raid your pantry. Baking soda, vinegar and plant-based ingredients are inexpensive and have a long, established history of keeping homes clean without introducing toxic chemicals. Baking soda is especially effective on carpets, rugs, sinks, drains, tubs and toilets. Vegetable oil with a splash of lemon is great on wood. Mix vinegar and water in a spray bottle for an effective window and mirror cleaner. Simmer cloves and cinnamon on the stove top for a natural air freshener.

Provided by the ASA – Houston Chapter Safety Committee

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