



MCS America
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MCSA NEWS

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 12

DECEMBER 2007

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All I Want For Christmas



Is Unscented Laundry

All I Want for Christmas Is Unscented Laundry



**“An
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Most children send letters to Santa Claus requesting new toys and games, while adults request gifts of diamonds, jewelry, new clothes, tools, and the latest electronic gadgets. However a large subset of the population is asking for something entirely different for Christmas... scent free laundry and clean air to breathe.

An estimated 45.4 million people in the United States report fragrance and chemical sensitivity (Kreutzer et al, 1999); 26.7 million have been diagnosed with asthma (Mannino et al, 2002); and 50 million suffer from allergies (AAAAI, 1996-2001).

Many of these individuals have unique viewpoints in common... how to safely clean clothing and promote cleaner, less polluted air. They are not merely concerned with the products that they personally use, but with the products that their neighbors use, citing that fragranced laundry products pollute the air and may cause harmful effects on humans, especially small children and pets. MCS America interviewed some of these people along with the general public.

Kathi, who suffers with multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), states, “My neighbors’ choice of laundry products can make a difference whether I can spend time outside

my house on my deck, whether I can have my doors/windows open to let in outside air, and whether I’m made ill (when) leaving my house to walk somewhere. I can end up spending two or three days sick in bed from an exposure from someone’s dryer vent spewing fabric softener.”

Jan adds, “The fragrance spewed from dryer vents permeates the air for a few blocks surrounding a home. I’m not free to go for a walk whenever and wherever I choose. I may get an immediate headache, muscle pain, fatigue, and impaired cognitive abilities. Sometimes I take the fragrance home with me because it penetrates my clothes, hair and skin.”

Toxicity of Fragrances

At first this may sound fantastical; however, scientific studies have confirmed many of these effects (Anderson & Anderson, 2000; Anderson & Anderson, 1998).

Fabric softeners and scented laundry products pollute the neighborhood air and may cause respiratory toxicity (Anderson & Anderson, 2000). They also leave residues on clothing that may cause healthy individuals sharing the same airspace to suffer sensory irritation, pulmonary irritation, inflammation of interalveolar septae of the lungs, and airflow limitation (Anderson & Anderson, 2000).

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Laundry that has been dried with a fabric softener dryer sheet was shown to emit sufficient chemicals to elicit sensory irritation in healthy mice (Anderson & Anderson, 2000). Simply placing a fabric softener dryer sheet in a room overnight was shown to result in an atmosphere that caused marked sensory irritation (Anderson & Anderson, 2000).

While fabric softeners may cause effects in otherwise healthy individuals, the effect is magnified for those with asthma, allergies, and chemical sensitivity. Barb confirms, “When my neighbor’s young daughter wanted to play at my house with our puppy, I had to stay far away from the fragrances in her clothes.” Multiple chemical sensitivity, asthma, and allergies can be extremely socially isolating for this reason, as these products are in the majority of shared public air space from other users.

Fragranced laundry products are “toxic, no doubt about it”, said Jan. A child presented with a partial thickness burn secondary to prolonged contact with a liquid biological laundry detergent (Howieson et al, 2007). An experiment on a volunteer confirmed that it was highly plausible that the standard laundry product indeed caused the child’s burns (Howieson et al, 2007).

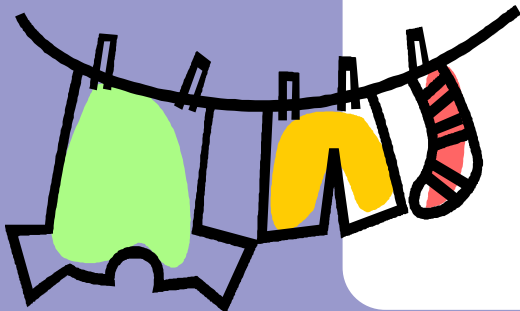
“A non-perfumed, non-enzyme product may be found less irritating” (Scowen, 1996). Kathy concludes that “fragranced laundry products are definitely not safe.”

Joyce knows that fragranced laundry products contain very toxic ingredients that directly affect human health. “They’re not safe, because if you look at the chemical make-up of these fragrances and the similarity to gasoline, you understand exactly why.” Scientists have revealed that “residues of common washing detergents in cotton underclothes play an important role in the winter deterioration of dry skin” (Kiriyaama et al, 2003).

Now, these studies provide a basis for human complaints of adverse reactions to fragranced laundry products (Anderson & Anderson, 2000; Anderson & Anderson, 1998; Howieson et al, 2007; Scowen, 1996; Kiriyaama et al, 2003).

Bonita feels that fragranced laundry products “are full of multiple toxic chemical ingredients that have no business being in the marketplace.” In addition to fragrances, laundry products contain many other questionable ingredients, including carboxylates, sulphates, phosphates, sulphonates, polyphosphates, sodium silicate, carboxymethyl cellulose, sodium carbonate, sodium silicate, sodium sulfate, solvents, xylene sulfonate, colorants, opacifiers, fluorescent dyes, protease, and lipase (Bajpai, D and Tyagi, 2007).

When simple and natural baking soda and borax cleans clothes, there really is no need for the toxic soap laundry products have become. There are many safe and natural ways to clean clothing. Why are fragrances used in these products?



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Purpose of Fragrances

Manufacturers use fragrances to differentiate their brand from other brands in an effort to increase sales. Proponents for scent-free laundry remind us that fragrances are not necessary to clean clothing. “The purpose behind it is to make profit, and people fall for (their) ads,” said Ellie. It’s “a marketing strategy to make money,” added Jan.

Others think that fragrances are added to offset the unpleasant smells of the chemicals in products and indeed “scent free” products are not really fragrance free. As Bonita explains, “They are put in to mask smells,” both chemical and odiferous.

The purpose of fragrances in laundry products is hard to understand for many people. Kathi simply states, “I do not understand a purpose.” Linda agrees, “There is no good purpose to chemical fragrances. Clean does not smell.”

It is true that fragrances don’t clean, nor do they deodorize; they just add a scent in an attempt to mask an odor. Clothes that are truly clean will have no odor at all.

When a strong fragrance is present, the natural tendency is to wonder what odor the fragrance is there to mask. “When I smell a strong fragrance on a person or in a room, I wonder

what’s so dirty that they are trying to hide. Fragrance is just repulsive!” states Beth.

Still others, like Joyce, believe that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to fragranced laundry products. She says she believes the purpose of fragranced laundry products is “to make us sick, to increase diseases, and to profit the pharmaceutical and chemical companies.”

Indeed the pharmaceutical and chemical industries do have a vested interest in selling their products. They also have the financial and political power to suppress evidence that shows that their products are harmful to humans. Though science is supposed to be objective of the researcher’s viewpoint, it is often biased based on the views of researchers and the funding source for the study. Studies with which these researchers disagree are often referred to as “junk science” on the basis of their staunch beliefs and undisclosed conflicts of interest. Many journals ask that researchers reveal their affiliations, however not all journals require this and affiliations may not be fully disclosed.

With no real purpose for fragrances other than industry profits and consumers misled by advertisements, the air often just plain stinks. Worse, these fragrances are unhealthy. Childhood asthma is increasing at an alarming rate, along with the increased use of fragranced laundry products and other environmental and industrial contaminants.



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Obtaining Cooperation to Clear the Air

Many want to clear the air of these unnecessary and unsafe fragranced products in favor of unscented and safer alternatives; however, the proposal is often met with strong resistance by those who are unaware of the dangers and who have been misled by advertisements designed for industry profit. Those most severely affected by these products often encourage friends, coworkers, family, and neighbors to switch to safer products, a frequently daunting proposition.

Jan says, “It’s easier to tell someone a loved one has died than it is to ask someone to change personal/laundry care products.”

Kathi has purchased unscented laundry products and given them to neighbors, trying to get them to switch. “I have tried to talk people into switching for my benefit, and the benefit of others. I have sent people information by email about the toxicity of fragrance and how bad it is for

people in general, and particularly babies and children.”

Steve identifies the reality, saying the “problem is the prod-

ucts are 100% legal, so they technically don’t have to switch. Most say nothing (to their neighbors), especially if you share the same landlord and don’t want to risk eviction or trigger a dispute.”

The real question, since these products are legally sold, is whether it is reasonable to ask others to alter their personal habits to accommodate an individual. Barb believes it is reasonable if others want her to participate in any activities with them.

Jan firmly believes that it is reasonable to ask others to change their personal habits when they invade her air space. Bonita tells people “Stay away from me and don’t come to my scent-free safe house! I pick my friends by whether or not I can be around them without getting sick. My nose can tell right away!”

Kathi is a bit more modest in her view, while standing firm in her boundaries, stating “I don’t think there is a problem asking them. I’m not sure whether I have the right to expect them to change. Certainly lots of people have no intention of changing to accommodate me. And, I just can’t be around those people.”

We asked users of these products if they believed their choice of products affected others. Karen stated “yes.” Donnie added, “Yes, unless the products are fragrance, toxic chemical, and allergen free.” Le agreed “Yes, I do, but I didn’t always. Many of my choices may also affect others in one way or another.”

“The truth is we only have one body. Once it becomes damaged and sick, we don’t get a second chance.”

Yet Le would have to give baking soda, vinegar, or other natural laundry products a test before agreeing to use them and Karen flat out said “no.” Karen’s appalling comment was “I’ve heard they contain toxic chemicals but I will still continue to use the products I like that contain fragrances. I’m pretty healthy, so I’m not concerned about it for myself.”

We asked several people how they would react if someone told them that the laundry soap or fabric softener residues on their clothing was making them sick?

Karen said, “I try to stay away from that person.” Le agreed, “I may change my laundry soap, or limit my contact with that person, or I may do both.” The social ramifications, therefore, often lead to painful and unwanted isolation for affected individuals. Usually, affected individuals want contact with others, not isolation from them. The fact is that others often take offense to their request for the use of safer laundry products. Affected individuals are left alone and insulted instead of accommodated. A simple solution is to use unscented laundry products, or better yet, baking soda and/or borax. Not only would that be helping someone who needs to share the airspace, but it would be healthier for everyone.

Conclusion

Though most who have not suffered ill effects from fragranced laundry products realize that the fragrances

are unnecessary for cleaning, they have not accepted the science that shows how dangerous these products are for everyone, even those with excellent health. Therefore, they often fail to take protective measures and use safer products. People who develop multiple chemical sensitivity and asthma are generally not born with it, but rather develop it later in life after a chronic or acute toxic exposure. No one is really safe from the dangers these products present. Is it really that difficult to use safer products?

The truth is we only have one body. Once it becomes damaged and sick, we don’t get a second chance. If we buy only safe products and reject unsafe products, manufactures will have to produce more of what we wish to purchase in classic supply and demand fashion.

Give the year-round gift of wearing scent free laundry to others who share your airspace! Your friends will thank you!

Merry Christmas!

-LS



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