

With concerns over COVID-19, more businesses are enhancing their cleaning processes. As such, West Bend has seen an almost 300% increase in workers' compensation claims associated with chemical exposures in the last 30 days. With increased cleaning of "high-touch" surfaces in and around the workplace, it's essential to ensure proper use and self-protection when dealing with cleaning chemicals.

Many cleaning products, even those bought at the store or considered "consumer-strength" can be harmful. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines cleaners, sanitizers, and disinfectants as follows:

- **Cleaners** remove dirt through wiping, scrubbing, or mopping.
- **Sanitizers** contain chemicals that reduce, but do not necessarily eliminate, microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, and molds from surfaces. Public health codes may require cleaning with the use of sanitizers in certain areas like toilets and food preparation areas.
- **Disinfectants** contain chemicals that destroy or inactivate microorganisms that cause infections. Disinfectants are critical for infection control in hospitals and other healthcare settings.¹

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend selecting the least potent cleaner required for the job. The more potent the cleaning chemical, the more hazardous it typically is. Limit exposure to harsh chemicals as much as possible. ***Disinfectants*** are generally the strongest, followed by ***Sanitizers***, and then ***General Cleaners***.

Reduce your exposure by:

- Ensuring proper storage, handling, and use (including dilution practices) of all cleaning chemicals.
- Knowing what cleaning chemicals you're working with and how or where to obtain and use hazard information (*e.g.*, product labels, safety data sheets [SDSs], Poison Control number **800-222-1222**).
- Not using a product if you haven't been trained or aren't knowledgeable in using it.
- Making sure the area being cleaned is well ventilated. If necessary, use a fan or open a window. If the smell of cleaning chemicals irritates you and/or you feel light-headed, remove yourself from the environment.
- Not mixing cleaning chemicals unless instructed to do so. Some chemicals when mixed, like bleach and ammonia, can be toxic and cause serious damage to the skin, eyes, and lungs.
- Not washing your skin with cleaning chemicals, as that could result in skin irritation or chemical burns.
- Wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including:
 - Gloves – when handling wet, dry, or aerosol-based chemicals
 - Long sleeves – when chemicals may splash or encounter the arms
 - Eye protection – when using chemicals that can splash up
 - Smock - when chemicals could splash toward the torso
- Always washing your hands after handling cleaning chemicals.
- Avoiding eating, drinking, or touching your face, skin, and eyes when working with chemicals.

¹ The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Design for the Environment (DfE), 2012 (<http://www.epa.gov/dfe>).