Label Reading Guide.

Companies manufacturing cleaning products are not required to tell you what chemicals they use in their products. Without ingredient transparency, it's hard for people to make safe, well-informed decisions. To help educate you about how to read labels so you can understand the potential risks in many cleaning products, Seventh Generation wants to equip you with the Label Reading Guide. Download the mobile phone application or the desktop widget and become a better ingredient detective today.

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Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
Di-(Palmcarboxyethyl)-hydroxy-ethyl- methylammonium methyl sulfate Palm oil-derived fabric softener.	Reduces static and fabric stiffness.	This fabric softening agent is not derived from animal tallow, but is vegetable based instead. See fabric softening agents.
Acid Any chemical compound that, when dissolved in water produces a pH less than 7.0. Acids with low pH are considered strong acids and can be corrosive.	Effective in removing hard-water deposits, discoloration, and is commonly found in cleaning agents. Examples include hydrochloric acid, lactic acid, citric acid and phosphoric acid.	Products with high acid content can be hazardous and should be used with caution. Avoid inhalation and contact with skin and eyes. See pH, acidic.
Acidic Used to describe an acid or something with a pH less than 7.0 (neutral).		Products with high acid content can be hazardous and should be used with caution. Avoid inhalation and contact with skin and eyes. See pH, acid.
Acidity The property of being acidic.		See acidic, acid, pH.
Active ingredient The ingredient that is directly responsible for the function of a product.	To carry out the product's function. For example, a surfactant in dish soap acts to remove dirt and oil from dishes.	If a product is an EPA registered disinfectant or sanitizer (also known as an antimicrobial pesticide), the active ingredient is required to be listed on the front of the product label. All other ingredients are referred to as "Inert Ingredients" even if they have a function in the product. In cleaning products there is no requirement to list any ingredient unless it represents a specific hazard. Ingredients like surfactants are examples of active ingredients, that are not required to be listed as active ingredients on product labels. See Bleach, sodium hypochlorite, D-Limonene, enzymes, bacteria, phenol.
Adequate ventilation A term used to describe a continuous exchange of fresh air with contaminated air. Although many labels indicate the need for adequate ventilation, there is no regulated standard for the term "adequate".	Included on product labeling to prevent lung, eye, or throat irritation associated with product use.	Products containing chemicals that warn against inhalation may cause irritation and could be lethal if inhaled in large quantities. Look for the adequate ventilation warning on labels and try to avoid chemicals such as: ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, butoxyethanol, and VOCs. See ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, butoxyethanol, VOCs.
Alcohol A plant-derived ingredient used as an antimicrobial or as a solvent in hard surface cleaners.	Used to kill microorganisms and prevent OR inhibit the growth and reproduction of microorganisms OR to dissolve other substances.	Generally recognized as safe but can be an eye and skin irritant. VOC contributes to indoor and outdoor air pollution. Biodegrades quickly and does not build up in living organisms. See antimicrobial, solvent.
Alkali Any chemical compound that, when dissolved in water produces a pH greater than 7.0. Alkalis with high pH levels are considered strong alkalis (also called strong bases) and can be caustic.	Effective in removing grease and oil soils. Examples include ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, and sodium hydroxide.	Products with high alkalinity tend to be hazardous and should be used with caution. Avoid inhalation and contact with skin, and eyes.
Alkaline Used to describe an alkali (base) or something with a pH greater than 7.0 (neutral).		Products with high alkalinity tend to be hazardous and should be used with caution. Avoid inhalation and contact with skin, and eyes.

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Alkalinity The property of being alkaline.		See alkaline.
Alkyl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride A chemical used as a preservative, surfactant, foam booster, foam stabilizer or a skin softening agent. Commonly used in kitchen, bathroom and surface cleaners.	Can be used to prevent antimicrobial growth OR help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR help a product foam or make foam last longer OR help soften and soothe the skin.	Irritating to the eyes and corrosive to the skin, skin sensitizer. Limited biodegradability. Toxic to fish. See surfactant.
Allergen Substances that produce a response of the immune system. The reaction of the immune system can range from mild to life-threatening.	An allergen initiates an immune response in the body and is what causes "allergies".	The most common allergens found in consumer products other than foods are fragrances. Because many products do not disclose ingredients, if you experience sensitivity to a product you should call the manufacturer for a list of ingredients. Companies may use claims such as 'fragrance free' or 'free and clear' which are unregulated claims, so it is always best to verify actual ingredients. See allergic reaction, fragrance free, free and clear, artificial fragrance.
Allergic reaction The response of the body's immune system when exposed to substances that it recognizes as "foreign" or "dangerous".		See allergen.
Aloe Barbadensis Leaf Juice or Aloe Babadensis Natural plant extract commonly called aloe vera.	Reduces skin flaking and restores suppleness.	Most cleaning products (including Seventh Generation's) do not contain sufficient aloe to provide a healing benefit.
Ammonia A chemical used as a pH adjuster or to denature alcohol. Commonly used in detergents, dish soap, and hard surface cleaners.	Can be used to help maintain the pH of a product OR as an ingredient to add to alcohol to make it unsuitable for drinking, by imparting an intensely bitter taste.	Irritating to the eyes and respiratory system and at high concentrations may be corrosive to the skin. It does not build up in living organisms. See pH, GRAS[Could not find on the GRAS list].
Ammonium hydroxide See Ammonia		See ammonia.
Amylase An enzyme commonly used in laundry detergents.	Used to remove starchy soils.	Amylase are generally safe for humans, and do not persist in the environment. Some individuals show skin sensitivity to enzymes. See enzymes.
Anionic surfactants Chemicals used to remove dirt and soils and are commonly found in detergents. They have a negative charge and are particularly effective at removing dirt, dust, and oil. They sometimes need help from other ingredients to prevent partial inactivation by hard water.	Help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	May be irritating to the skin and eyes. May or may not be biodegradable.
Antimicrobial An ingredient or product that prevents the growth of or destroys microorganisms including bacteria, viruses and fungi.	Used to prevent contamination in products or to disinfect/sanitize household objects such as toilets and countertops.	Includes naturally derived agents such as alcohol, and certain essential oils. Synthetic antimicrobials are most frequently used and can be hazardous to your health and to the environment. See triclosan, alcohol.
Anti-Redeposition agent Chemicals that aid in preventing loosened soil from redepositing onto cleaned fabrics or dishes. Commonly found in automatic laundry and dishwashing products.	Used to prevent soil from redepositing on cleaned fabrics or dishes.	See carboxymethylcellulose.
Aqua Another term for water, a clear, colorless, odorless, and tasteless liquid essential for most plant and animal life and the most widely used of all solvents.	Used to dissolve other substances.	See distilled water; deionized water.

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Artificial colors Synthetic chemicals used to give a product a certain hue. Commonly used in laundry and household cleaning products.	Used to give a product a certain color.	May be irritating to the skin and eyes. Sensitizers. Typically made from petroleum or coal and many are not biodegradable. May be toxic to aquatic life and lab animals.
Artificial fragrances Synthetic chemicals used to give a product a certain scent. Commonly used in laundry and household cleaning products.	To give a product a certain smell.	May be irritating to the skin and eyes. Sensitizers. Typically made from petroleum. Many are not biodegrade. May be toxic to aquatic life and lab animals.
Baking soda See sodium bicarbonate.		
Bamboo A woody perennial evergreen plant that is part of the grass family. It is the fastest growing woody plant in the world.	Used as a textile for cleaning wipes. Most often the term is used to describe a plastic fiber, viscose, made from bamboo.	Bamboo's rapid growth rate (3-4 ft./day) makes it a sustainable solution for household products that use fabrics, such as surface wipes. See bamboo fabric.
Bamboo fabric A natural textile made from the pulp of bamboo grass.	Used as a fabric for the popular cleaning products such as wipes.	Bamboo's rapid growth rate (3-4 ft./day) makes it a sustainable solution for household products that use fabrics, such as surface wipes. See bamboo.
Base See alkali.		
Biodegradable Capable of being broken down by natural chemical or biological processes into simple substances that are not harmful to the environment.	Used to indicate that the ingredient or product can degrade easily in the environment and will not accumulate to toxic levels.	Purchasing products that are biodegradable is always better for the environment, but be aware that the content of biodegradable ingredients and time to biodegrade varies among products and ingredients. Be cautious when purchasing a product that claims to include biodegradable ingredients but does not list all of the ingredients.
Bleach A substance that removes color from a surface or fabric.	To remove colored stains when cleaning a fabric or surface.	See sodium hypochlorite, hydrogen peroxide, sodium percarbonate
Boric acid A compound of boron and oxygen with a wide array of cosmetic, cleaning, and industrial uses. Derived from sodium borate (borax).	Water Softener: provides stability & pH balance; contributes to enzyme stability.	Although boric acid is acutely nontoxic and not carcinogenic, recently concerns have arisen that boric acid may be a male reproductive toxicant, with high levels of exposure resulting in reduced sperm counts. See sodium borate.
Brightener See optical brightener.		See optical brightener.
Buffering agent Used to adjust the pH to a certain state (acidic or alkaline) and prevent a change in this pH.	Used to maintain the pH of a product to prevent changes in the product's chemistry.	May be irritating to skin or eyes. Some may be sensitizers. May or may not be biodegradable. This term is often used to avoid revealing the actual ingredients in the product. You have the right to know what's in the products you buy. Demand disclosure. See pH, acid, alkali.
Butoxyethanol A chemical used as a solvent or as a thickener. Commonly used in hard surface cleaners.	Can be used to dissolve other substances OR as a thickener.	Biodegrades rapidly in water and soil and does not accumulate in living organisms. VOC contributes to indoor and outdoor air pollution. May cause birth defects in laboratory animals. May damage liver and kidneys. Irritating to eyes nose, mouth, and throat.
Butylcellosolve See butoxyethanol		
C12-15 pareth ethylbenzene sulfonate Used as a preservative, surfactant, foam booster, foam stabilizer, or skin softener typically found in detergents and dish soaps.	Used to prevent microbial growth OR to help water mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to help soften and soothe the skin.	Slightly irritating to the eyes. Toxic to aquatic life. Petroleum derived. Limited biodegradability.
Calcium chloride A salt of calcium and chloride.	Reduces thickness of some fabric softeners to avoid clogging dispensers and improve product dispersion.	Has low acute oral toxicity, but in high concentrations may be irritating to skin, eyes, and respiratory tract.

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Carboxymethyl inulin A complex sugar derived from chicory roots used as a water softener or anti-redeposition agent.	Used to make water soft OR to prevent soils from redepositing onto clean fabrics or dishes.	Low toxicity. Biodegradable. See water softeners; anti-redeposition agent.
Carboxymethylcellulose Wood derived anti-redeposition agent commonly used in laundry detergents.	Used to prevent soil from redepositing on clean fabrics or dishes.	Generally non-toxic. Biodegradable. Not harmful to aquatic organisms. Low potential for bioaccumulation. See anti-redeposition agent.
Cationic fabric softener See fabric softening agents (cationic)		
Caustic A term used to describe a substance that can be an irritant, cause chemical burns, or be corrosive. Also a term for a strong alkali.	Used as a warning term on hazardous chemicals that you should avoid.	Chemicals such as household chlorine bleach may be corrosive to the skin at high concentrations. Avoid cleaning products with the signal words DANGER!! CORROSIVE!! See ammonia, akyl dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride pH, alkali.
Caution A signal word meaning that the product is slightly to moderately toxic if eaten, absorbed through the skin, or inhaled, and may cause minor skin and eye irritation.	To create awareness of products effects on humans, animals, and the environment.	Most cleaning products have the term 'Caution' on their label, so to compare the safety of a product it is important to read and understand the label and ingredients. See signal words.
Cellulase An enzyme used in laundry detergents.	Maintains the luster of cotton fabrics by removing "fibrils" and reducing "pilling."	Generally safe for humans, and do not persist in the environment. Some individuals show skin sensitivity to enzymes. See enzymes.
Certified DfE The US EPA Design for the Environment (DfE) Program works with industry partners to reduce risk to people and the environment by preventing pollution. The DfE is not a measured standard; it recognizes and works with companies that are making changes to their product to prevent harm to the environment. DfE certification is determined by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency).	For cleaning products, the DfE program encourages manufacturers to replace toxic chemicals with chemicals that are safer for health and the environment. If the EPA considers all ingredients in a product the safest available, the DfE logo can be included on a product label.	Many consumers may prefer cleaning products that are inherently safer or do not irritate sensitive skin. Others may prefer products that break down quickly and do not harm fish or are safer for use around family pets. The DfE logo is an easy way to know you are choosing a product that has met a specific level of safety for people and the environment. See EPA.
Certified organic A certification process for producers of organic food. DOES NOT APPLY TO HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS. To be certified organic the producer must prove: avoidance of most synthetic chemicals, genetically modified organisms, irradiation, and the use of sewage sludge; use of farmland that has been free from chemicals for a number of years; keeping detailed written production and sales records; maintaining strict physical separation of organic products from non-certified products; and undergoing periodic on-site inspection.	Organic certification addresses a growing worldwide demand for organic food, but is UNREGULATED FOR HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS. It is intended to promote commerce in organic food and to prevent false claims.	The current organic standards were created for food and personal care products, not household cleaning products. Because of this, many of the ingredients used in household cleaners are either restricted from the organic standard or not in the standard at all. As a result, many companies are claiming the organic content within their formulas on their labels, but these products are not certified organic by a 3rd party. Also, this organic content is often a very small percentage of the overall product, which can be misleading for consumers. As always, when choosing household cleaning products reading the ingredients on the label is the best way to make choice. See VOC, synthetic.
Ceteareth-25 A nonionic surfactant made from plant oils.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	See nonionic surfactant, cleaning agent.
Chemical residue Ingredients of a cleaning product that remain on a surface after use.	Typically, residues do not serve a function and are not intended to be left on the surface after use. However, some products intentionally leave a residue, such as optical brighteners or fabric softeners. Residues may cause health and environmental concerns.	May be irritating and have adverse affects on the environment. Be sure to read labels as some products require you to rinse with water after use. See irritant, allergen.
Chlorine bleach See sodium hypochlorite		

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Citric acid Cornstarch-derived water softener and pH adjuster.	Used to remove water hardness OR adjust pH.	Not acutely toxic or chronically toxic. Used as a replacement for phosphates because citric acid does not promote eutrophication. See eutrophication, sodium orthophosphate.
Citrus extracts Oils extracted from the peel of oranges, lemons, or other citrus fruits.	Used to add scent to a product or prevent the growth of microorganisms in the product.	May be irritating to the skin and eyes. Biodegradable.
Cleaning agents Substances that removes soils from fabrics or surfaces.	Used in household cleaners to remove soils and stains from fabric or household surfaces.	Read the label to look for a complete ingredient list. Remember, the terms non-toxic, biodegradable, and no fumes are not regulated. You can only know what is in a cleaning product if the ingredients are listed. You have the right to know. See non-toxic, biodegradable, fumes.
Cocamide MEA A plant-derived chemical used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. MEA (monoethanolamine) is used instead of DEA (diethanolamine) to reduce the possibility that nitrosamines (a class of carcinogenic compounds) are formed. See plant derived.
Cocamidopropyl betaine A plant-derived chemical used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. See plant derived.
Coceth-4 A plant-derived non-ionic surfactant used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. See nonionic surfactant, coconut alcohol ethoxylate, plant derived.
Coceth-7 A plant-derived non-ionic surfactant used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. See nonionic surfactant; coconut alcohol ethoxylate, plant derived.
Coconut alcohol ethoxylate A plant-derived nonionic surfactant used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. See nonionic surfactant, plant derived.
Coconut based A chemical that is derived from coconut oils.	Indicates that an ingredient is naturally derived.	Often safer for humans and are better for the environment than synthetic chemicals. See naturally derived.
Coconut based surfactant A plant-derived chemical used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Generally recognized as safe. Biodegradable. Do not build up in living organisms. See coconut based.
Coconut oil based cleaners See coconut based surfactant.		
Colorants Substances added to a product to create a change in color; can be dyes, pigments, inks, or paints.	Used to make a product more visually appealing.	Synthetic colorants can be harmful to your health and to the environment and should be avoided by those with sensitive skin. There are naturally derived colorants from vegetables like beets that are preferable for human health and the environment. Many synthetic colorants use the naming convention "Color #" on labels, e.g. Red#6, whereas natural colorants may state "natural color/dye".
Complex sodium phosphate See sodium orthophosphate.		See Sodium Orthophosphate.

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Concentrated Describes a product that has not been diluted excessively with water and therefore can be stored and transported in smaller containers while delivering the same amount of cleaning.	Allows for more efficiency in packaging and use without sacrificing effectiveness.	Concentrated products have a lower weight and volume which gets more product to the consumer with lower use of packaging and fossil fuels, and less pollution caused by transportation.
Conventional Refers to a standard in mainstream agricultural or manufacturing practices. Can include use of pesticides, synthetic or hazardous chemicals, and other mainstream approaches to ingredients or end products.	Using synthetic chemical ingredients is typically less expensive than using naturally-derived chemical ingredients.	Although many conventional household cleaners are being improved to reduce their human health effects and environmental impacts, it is important to read labels to find out what are marketing claims versus real health and environmental improvements. See synthetic, naturally-derived.
Cruelty-Free Certification that a final product or its components are not tested on animals. The Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics' (CCIC) Leaping Bunny Program administers a cruelty-free standard and the internationally recognized Leaping Bunny Logo for companies producing cosmetic, personal care, and household products.	Notifies the consumer that the product and its components are not derived from animals nor have they been tested on animals.	The Leaping Bunny Program provides the best assurance that no new animal testing is used in any phase of product development by the company, its laboratories, or suppliers. Consider supporting companies who do not test on animals.
Danger A signal word meaning that the product is highly toxic and may cause death or irreversible damage to eyes and skin. If the product is highly toxic and may be accidentally eaten, inhaled, or absorbed through the skin, then Poison must be included on the label in red writing.	Warns of a product's potential toxicity to humans, animals, and the environment.	Avoid products with DANGER appearing on the label and consider less hazardous products with the signal word CAUTION or without any warning. See caution, signal word.
Deceth-5 A plant-derived nonionic surfactant used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. See nonionic surfactant, coconut alcohol ethoxylate, Plant derived.
Degradable Indicates that a substance is capable of being readily decomposed by biological or chemical action, breaking down into less harmful materials.	Deplete in the environment faster while becoming less harmful to the environment.	Look for biodegradable products that contain plant or mineral derived ingredients and avoid products containing phosphates. See biodegradable.
Deionized water Water treated with a filtering process that removes most minerals.	Used to prevent inactivation of chemicals in a product by charged molecules in untreated water.	Yields a high purity of water that is generally similar to distilled water. However, deionization does not remove organic molecules, viruses or bacteria.
Dermatologist tested A marketing claim verifying that a product was tested by a dermatologist. While it implies that the product did not cause skin reactions, the claim only means that the product was tested by a dermatologist. There are no standards to support this claim other than those set by the company manufacturing or marketing the product.	Indicates that a product has been evaluated by a dermatologist.	Although consumers with sensitive skin may be attracted to this claim, it does not mean dermatologists approved the product or that a product is appropriate for sensitive skin. It is important to review the ingredients of the product if your skin is sensitive.
Dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride A chemical used as a preservative, surfactant, foam booster, foam stabilizer or skin softener commonly used in kitchen, bathroom and surface cleaners.	Used to prevent microbial growth OR to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to help soften and soothe the skin.	Eye, skin and respiratory irritant. May be fatal if ingested.
Dimethyl benzyl ammonium saccharinate See dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride		

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Disinfectant Products used on hard inanimate surfaces and objects to destroy or inactivate fungi, bacteria, and viruses that can cause infections. Disinfectants are antimicrobial pesticides and regulated by the US Environmental Protection Agency.	Used to inactivate or destroy fungi, bacteria, and viruses. Common types include sprays, dilutable concentrates and wipes.	Disinfectants require EPA registration and typically use synthetic and sometimes hazardous chemicals. There are non-EPA registered products on the market that contain naturally-derived ingredients and have the same effectiveness and less impact on human health and the environment. See antimicrobial, antibacterial, EPA, concentrate.
Disposal and storage Many cleaning products contain hazardous chemicals that have to be stored or disposed of in a specific way. Contact your local waste management authority to find out where a household chemical can be disposed. If the container is empty, recycle it. For storage, read the label and follow directions. Always store any cleaning agents away from children and pets. If you have questions, call the manufacturer.		Many cleaning products contain hazardous chemicals that have to be stored and/or disposed of in the appropriate manner to avoid deterioration, environmental contamination or human health risks. See do not mix.
Distilled water Water treated by boiling and condensing to remove minerals.	Used to prevent inactivation of chemicals in a product by charged molecules in untreated water.	Yields a high purity of water that is generally similar to deionized water. However, distillation does not remove all organic contaminants.
DMDM hydantoin A chemical used as a preservative or antimicrobial agent in detergents, hand dish soaps, and personal care products.	Used to prevent microbial growth OR to kill microorganisms	Irritating to skin eyes and lungs and is considered an allergen. Forms and releases formaldehyde which results in adverse health and environmental effects.
Do not mix Designation on a label that a product should not be mixed with other household cleaners.	Intended to warn consumers that mixing even small amounts of hazardous chemicals can have disastrous results.	Combining hazardous chemicals to save space can be extremely dangerous to you and the environment because of the chemical reactions that can occur. When storing or discarding cleaning products always read the label to determine the safest way to do so. See disposal and storage.
EDTA Ethylenediaminetetraacetic Acid is a synthetic chemical that binds metal ions to maintain product appearance and prevent product deterioration. Commonly used in hard surface cleaners.	Used to bind metal ions to prevent products from becoming cloudy or discolored.	Generally recognized as safe, but can cause slight skin and eye irritation. Does not accumulate in living organisms. Limited biodegradability in soil or water, but specific conditions must be met (bound to metal molecules or adding certain microorganisms). See ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
Enzymes A protein or protein-based molecule that speeds up a chemical reaction in or on a living organism. Commonly used in carpet cleaning, automatic dishwashing detergent, and laundry detergent.	Used to break down complex soils such as grass and blood, so that these soils can be more easily removed by other detergent ingredients.	Enzymes are eliminated while they fulfill their purpose and are therefore safe for humans and do not persist in the environment. Some people have skin sensitivity to enzymes.
EPA Stands for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA leads the nation's environmental science, research, education and assessment efforts.	The EPA regulates all pesticide products which include household disinfectants and sanitizers. In addition, the EPA develops and enforces environmental laws passed by Congress. When environmental laws are not met, the EPA can take steps to assist the states in reaching the desired levels of environmental quality.	The EPA's mission is to protect human health and the environment.
Ethanol See alcohol.		
Ethoxylated alcohol See linear surfactant.		
Ethyl alcohol See alcohol.		
Ethyl benzyl ammonium chloride See dimethyl Benzyl ammonium chloride.		

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Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid See EDTA.		
Extract A component of a raw material separated from other components by dissolving in solvent such as ethanol or water.	Typically plant-based ingredients that are used to add fragrance or color to household products.	Look for naturally derived extracts in contrast to artificial fragrance and color. See solvent, ethanol, naturally derived extracts, artificial fragrance, artificial color, colorant.
Fabric brightener Chemicals used to increase the amount of light reflected from a fabric.	Used to make fabrics look more vibrant.	See optical brightener.
Fabric softening agents Chemicals that work to make fabric feel softer and to reduce static cling.	Impart a soft feel to fabrics and reduce static.	Many fabric softeners are made from animal tallow. Look for a list of ingredients on your fabric softener. You have a right to know.
Fabric softening agents (Cationic) Cationic (positively charged) surfactants that impart a soft feel to fabrics and reduce static.	Impart a soft feel to fabrics and reduce static	Many traditional fabric softeners are made from animal fats (tallow). Soy and canola oils are also used. Quaternary softening agents (called "Ester Quats") are neither acutely nor chronically toxic. May be irritating to skin or eyes. Ester quats are biodegradable.
Food grade extracts Denotes that the substance taken from the a raw material and the raw material are considered safe enough to be consumed.	Commonly used to describe fragrance and color extracts.	Implies that the extract is considered safe because it can be consumed. See naturally derived extracts, fragrance, colorant.
Fragrance A scent added to a product.	To create a pleasant odor.	It is important to know the source of a scent and the chemicals used to modify a scent. Look for natural sources like plants versus synthetic sources. Synthetic perfumes can contribute to poor indoor air quality. Look for ingredient lists that include fragrance disclosure. You have a right to know. See synthetic.
Fragrance free A product that does not have an odor or scent. Suggests that no compounds are added to the product to fragrance it.	To alert consumers that the product is unscented.	Products labeled "Fragrance Free", "Unscented", or "Perfume Free" may still contain small amounts of fragrances called masking agents used to hide unpleasant odors from other ingredients. Look carefully at the product label to confirm this claim. See masking agents, free and clear.
Free and clear Implies that the product is free and clear of colors, dyes, and fragrances, although what the product is free and clear of is not completely definable as there is no standard for what it includes.	Because fragrance and color are the most common irritants, free and clear products are made for consumers with sensitivity to added dyes and fragrances.	Someone who experiences allergic reactions or has sensitive skin may look for this claim on labels when making a purchase. Please keep in mind that this is an unregulated claim, and it is always best to read the label. If ingredients are not disclosed, call the manufacturer as it is your right to know. See allergic reactions.
Fumes A vaporous or smoke-like emission. Fumes may be odorless or invisible, but can be hazardous if inhaled.		You should always read directions and use adequate ventilation when using cleaning products to avoid any harm to you or your home. Many fumes, like VOCs, can be hazardous if too many are inhaled. See adequate ventilation, VOCs.
Generally recognized as safe (GRAS) A designation by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that a chemical or substance added to food is considered safe and is exempt from certain federal regulations. A substance must be shown to be "generally recognized as safe" under the conditions of its intended use.	To indicate that an ingredient is safe.	A substance can receive a GRAS designation by either FDA approval or chemical manufacturer approval. Therefore, even if an ingredient has a GRAS designation it may not have been reviewed by the FDA.

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Glycerin A chemical used as a moisturizer, thinner or to prevent moisture loss. Commonly used in hard surface cleaners and kitchen/bathroom/surface cleaners. Change "thinner" to reference "to modify viscosity" and add laundry to list of products.	Can be used to prevent the loss of moisture from a product OR as a skin conditioning agent OR to decrease the thickness of a product.	Generally recognized as safe. Biodegrades rapidly in water and soil and does not build up in living organisms. Look for products that contain vegetable, not animal derived glycerin.
Glyceryl oleate Plant-derived antifoaming agent.	Prevents excessive foaming in high efficiency (HE) washing machines.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms.
Glycol ether Chemicals used as solvents, thinners or to prevent moisture loss. Commonly used in hard surface cleaners.	Can be used to prevent the loss of moisture from a product OR to dissolve another substance OR to decrease the thickness of a product.	Non-toxic. Degrades rapidly in soil and water and does not build up in living organisms.
Hexahydro-1,3,5-Tris (2-Hydroxyethyl)-S-Triazine Prevents the growth of bacteria, yeast, or fungi in a product.	Used to maintain product integrity and prevent microbial contamination and growth.	Seventh Generation uses this preservative in some of its products at levels less than 0.05%. See the Seventh Generation website for additional information.
Hydrogen peroxide An oxidizing and bleaching agent made from oxygen and hydrogen commonly used in chlorine-free bleaches.	Used to remove stains by bleaching	3-4% Hydrogen peroxide is not toxic but is irritating to eyes and skin. Not harmful to the environment.
Hydroxyethylcellulose Plant-derived cleaning agent.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms.
Inert ingredients Ingredients that do not contribute to the function of a product.	To add bulk or other non-performance related properties to a product.	If a product is an EPA registered disinfectant or sanitizer (Also known as an antimicrobial pesticide), the active ingredient is required to be listed on the front of the product label. All other ingredients are referred to as "Inert Ingredients" even if they have a function in the product.In cleaning products there is no requirement to list any ingredient unless it represents a specific hazard. See active ingredients.
Irritants A substance that causes discomfort; for example: itchy or watery eyes, running nose, or redness of the skin.		
Lactic acid A naturally derived alpha-hydroxy acid used to exfoliate the skin, adjust pH, condition skin, kill microbes, demineralize, or prevent moisture loss. Commonly used in all purpose cleansers.	Used to prevent the loss of moisture from a product OR as a skin conditioning agent OR to help remove dead skin cells from the skin surface OR to kill microbes OR to remove lime scale and soap scum OR to help maintain a product's pH.	Low toxicity, but can be irritating to skin and eyes. Biodegradable in soil and water and does not build up in living organisms.
Lauramidopropylamine oxide A synthetic chemical used as a surfactant, preservative, antimicrobial agent or antistatic agent. Commonly used in cleaning, laundry, and dishwashing products.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help prevent static OR to kill or prevent the growth or microbes.	Toxic to aquatic life.
Lauryl polyglucose Plant-derived cleaning agent.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. See nonionic surfactant, polyglucose.
Lemon fragrance See fragrance.		As used in Seventh Generation products, Lemon Fragrance is derived from plant-extracts and essential oils. See fragrance.

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
d-Limonene A clear liquid from the peel of an orange used as a solvent. Commonly used in hard surface cleaners. All purpose –> hard surface.	Used as an ingredient to dissolve other substances.	Generally recognized as safe although can irritate skin, eyes and lungs. Can be a skin sensitizer. Biodegradable, but is categorized as a marine pollutant, or slightly hazardous for water. Reportable as a VOC when used as a solvent. See sensitizer, VOC.
Linear sulfonate See linear surfactant.		
Linear surfactant Cleaning agents commonly used in detergents, household cleaners, and personal care products.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be washed away.	Irritating to skin and eyes. Biodegradable. Toxic to aquatic life. Does not build up in living organisms.
Low sudsing Detergents used in automatic cleaners like dishwashers or front loading washing machines that create less foam and bubbles and are more efficient as they use less water and energy.		By choosing low sudsing detergents and HE appliances you use less energy and save water.
Magnesium chloride A mineral-derived ingredient that is used as a thickener. Commonly found in detergents and hand dish soap.	Used to increases the thickness of a product OR to enhance the efficacy of certain cleaning agents.	Non-toxic mineral. In high concentrations may be irritating to the eyes.
Magnesium isododecylbenzenesulfonate See sodium xylenesulfonate.		
Magnesium sulfate Also known as Epsom salt, it is a mineral-derived chemical that is used to increase product volume and is commonly used in detergents, soaps and personal care products.	Used to increase volume of a product.	Should not be used in high concentrations by persons with heart disease. Low toxicity. High concentrations may be irritating to the eyes.
Masking agent Chemicals (usually synthetic) used to cover up another chemical, color, or fragrance.	Used to hide unpleasant odors from other ingredients.	Avoid products that include synthetic fragrances and masking agents or that do not disclose these in complete ingredient lists. You have a right to know. See fragrance, colorant.
Methyl bis(cannola amidoethyl) -2-hydroxyethyl ammonium methyl sulfate Canola-derived fabric softener.	Reduces static and fabric stiffness.	Traditional fabric softeners are derived from animal fats (tallow). A canola-based fabric softener is a cruelty-free choice. See fabric softening agents.
Methyl bis(soy amidoethyl) -2-hydroxyethyl ammonium methyl sulfate Soy-derived fabric softener.	Reduces static and fabric stiffness.	Traditional fabric softeners are derived from animal fats (tallow). A soy-based fabric softener is a cruelty-free choice. See fabric softening agents.
Methylisothiazolinone A synthetic preservative typically used in detergents and hand dish soap.	Used to prevent microbial growth.	Corrosive to skin and also a skin sensitizer. Toxic to aquatic organisms and may cause long term adverse effects in aquatic environments like lakes, rivers and oceans. Persistent in the environment. Poisonous to nerves or nerve tissue of rats.
Mineral derived An ingredient that is made from naturally occurring substances formed through geological processes.		There are many different classifications of minerals. Some mineral derived compounds found in cleaning products may be toxic, Look for signal words like "CAUTION" or "DANGER." Look for an ingredient list. You have a right to know.
Minerals A naturally occurring substance formed through geological processes that has a characteristic chemical composition. A common source of chemicals used in laundry and household cleaning products.		There are many different classifications of minerals. Some mineral derived compounds found in cleaning products may be toxic, Look for signal words like "CAUTION" or "DANGER." Look for an ingredient list. You have a right to know.

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
MSDS Material Safety Data Sheets contain safety information about a product or chemical that is used in a work place.	Since disclosing inert ingredients is not required on cleaning products, the MSDS is one resource to help determine if a product contains hazardous ingredients.	The MSDS includes information such as what hazardous substances are in a product, physical data (melting point, boiling point, flash point etc.), toxicity, health effects, first aid, reactivity, storage, disposal, protective equipment, and spill/leak procedures. Most MSDS's are available on the manufactures website or online. See inert ingredients.
n-Alkyl (C12-C16) dimethylbenzyl ammonium chloride See dimethyl benzyl ammonium chloride.		
Natural Implies that a product or ingredient is derived from plant, animal, or mineral sources and is minimally processed. The term "Natural" is not regulated.	Used to imply that an ingredient is derived from nature and is healthier for people and better for the environment.	Use of this term is not regulated so it is often used inappropriately. Beware of false claims, and keep mind that natural is sometimes applied to an individual ingredient, and is sometimes applied to the entire product. Looking at the label carefully and reading an ingredient list may help determine how natural a product is.
Natural plant based fragrance Chemicals obtained from plants that are used to give a product a certain scent. Commonly used in laundry and household cleaning products.	To give a product a unique scent.	May be irritating to the skin and eyes. My be sensitizers. Biodegradable.
Naturally derived To come from, to be developed, or evolved into a substance with minimal processing.	Used to describe an ingredient that has little development since its origin.	This is a good indicator that the product uses at least some natural alternatives in their product. However, be sure to look though all ingredients as "natural" can refer to only one ingredient and may sometimes be used in a misleading way. See natural.
Naturally derived surfactants A plant or mineral derived chemical used to remove dirt and soil. Commonly found in detergents and household cleaners.	Used to help water rinse away oil and dirt.	Naturally-derived chemicals are often safer for humans and are better for the environment than synthetic chemicals.
Neutral pH A neutral pH (pH=7) is neither acidic nor basic.		See pH, acidic, alkaline.
Neutralizer An agent that counterbalances or counteracts unfavorable characteristics of other ingredients.	A pH neutralizer is a substance that returns the pH of a product to neutral (pH 7).An odor neutralizer makes an odor undetectable to the human sense of smell.	
No animal ingredients Implies that the development of the product, and where applicable, its ingredients have not involved the use of any animal product, by-product, or derivatives.	This is important for consumers concerned about the use of animal-derived ingredients and about cruelty to animals.	Not only is this vital for vegans, but more consumers are concerned with products using animals or animal by-products in household cleaners. Since vegan claims and certifications are not regulated it is always best to check company website or call to get confirmation.
Non-Active ingredients See inert ingredients.		
Nonionic surfactants Chemicals used to remove dirt and soils and are commonly found in detergents. They have no charge which prevents them from being inactivated in hard water and are particularly good at removing oils.	Help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	May or may not be biodegradable.

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
Non-polluting Implies that a product does not contaminate or corrupt the environment.	To inform consumers that the product does not pollute the environment.	This is not a regulated claim. Read the product label thoroughly as there is no standard set or measurement for the claim 'non-polluting.' Look for other claims that clarify or support this claim. Although the product itself may not pollute, the company's other products or their manufacturing processes might - be informed about the practices of the companies you support.
Non-Toxic Implies that the product is not composed of poisonous materials that could harm the environment or human health.		This is an unregulated claim. Signal words on labels inform the consumer of hazards associated with a product. For further information call the company for ingredient disclosure or look up the MSDS sheet online. Best of all, find a product with full ingredient disclosure. You have a right to know. See cruelty free, vegan, no animal testing, signal words, MSDS.
Not tested on animals Implies that no animals were used for the testing of a product.	Individuals concerned with animal welfare consider using products with this claim on the label.	Look for the "Leaping Bunny" logo or other certification that a company does not unnecessarily test on animals. See cruelty-free.
Odor neutralizer A compound added to counteract unpleasant odors, most common in air care, carpet cleaning and fabric care products.		Look for to the ingredients when seeking out this product, so you can evaluate the safety and efficacy of the product.
Oleic acid Plant derived anti-foaming agent.	Prevents excessive foaming in high efficiency (HE) washing machines.	Not acutely or chronically toxic. May cause eye or skin irritation. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms.
Optical brightener An additive that increases the light reflected from the surface of a garment. Typically these additives remain as a chemical residue after a garment has been washed.	Commonly added to laundry detergents to replace whitening agents removed during washing and to make the clothes appear cleaner.	May cause allergic reactions and/ or irritation when in contact with skin from the chemical residue. See brighteners.
Oxygen bleach Cleaning agents that release oxygen to clean and bleach stains and dirt commonly used in carpet, household and laundry cleaning products. There are three common oxygen bleaches: hydrogen peroxide, sodium percarbonate and sodium perborate.	Used to remove stains.	May be irritating to skin or eyes. This term is often used to avoid revealing the actual ingredients in the product. You have the right to know what's in the products you buy. Demand disclosure. See hydrogen peroxide, sodium percarbonate.
Pareth-7 A nonionic surfactant used in detergents and household cleaners to remove dirt and soils.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. May be synthetic or plant derived. See nonionic surfactant; coconut alcohol ethoxylate.
Pentasodium pentetate A chemical that binds metal ions to maintain product appearance and prevent product deterioration. Typically used in detergents and hand dish soap.	Used to bind metal ions to prevent products from becoming cloudy or discolored.	Generally recognized as safe. Chronic use of high doses results in toxicity to the brain and lungs in humans. Biodegradable.
Perfume A mixture of aromatic compounds and solvents used to give the human body, products, and living spaces a scent.	To create a pleasant odor.	It is important to know the source of scents and other chemicals used in a perfume. Look for plant versus synthetic sources. Synthetic perfumes can contribute to poor indoor air quality. Look for ingredient lists that include fragrances. You have a right to know. See allergens, fragrance, solvents.

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
Petrochemical Chemicals made from petroleum, coal, or natural gas. Petrochemicals have many uses including artificial colors, artificial fragrances, solvents, surfactants, or pesticides.	Used to add color OR add fragrance OR dissolve other substances OR thicken OR thin OR prevent the growth of microorganisms OR soften skin OR increase the ability to foam OR stabilize a foam OR to help water disperse oil and grease OR prevent moisture loss from a product.	May be irritating to the skin and eyes or may be sensitizers. May have acute or chronic toxicities such as causing cancer. May mimic hormones and cause disruption of the reproductive system. Many do not biodegrade and are toxic to aquatic life. May be VOCs which contribute to indoor and outdoor air pollution. Petroleum is a non-renewable, and therefore non-sustainable, resource. See artificial colors, artificial fragrances, butoxyethanol, C12-15 pareth ethylbenzene sulfonate, fatty alcohols, glycol ethers.
Petroleum crude oil The term may also be used to refer to fossil fuels, generally, including crude oil, coal, and natural gas.	Petroleum is a non-renewable and non-sustainable resource. Many petroleum-derived substances are not biodegradable.	Look for an ingredient list to help determine it ingredients are petroleum derived. You have a right to know. See petrochemical, VOC.
Petroleum derived Substances that have been produced from crude oil, coal, or natural gas.	Petroleum is a non-renewable and non-sustainable resource. Many petroleum-derived substances are not biodegradable.	Look for an ingredient list to help determine it ingredients are petroleum derived. You have a right to know. See petroleum, petrochemical, VOC.
pH A measurement of the acidity or alkalinity of a product. The pH scale is 1-14 where 1-5 is acidic, 6-8 is approximately neutral (7 is exactly neutral), and 9-14 is alkaline.	Certain pH levels can be corrosive to skin. Strong acids or bases can be dangerous.	Look for signal words CAUTION, WARNING, or DANGER to determine if a product may be irritating or corrosive to skin. See acid, pH, alkaline.
pH balanced See neutral pH.		See neutral pH.
Phenoxyethanol A chemical used as a preservative or fragrance. Commonly used in detergents and hand dish soap.	Used to prevent microbial growth OR give the product a pleasant smell.	Causes kidney, liver and nervous system toxicity. Severe skin and eye irritant. Biodegradable in soil and water and does not build up in living organisms.
Phosphate See sodium orthophosphate.		
Phosphate esther See sodium orthophosphate.		
Phosphorus See sodium orthophosphate.		
Plant based See plant derived, cleaning agent, fragrance.		
Plant derived An ingredient originating from a plant. Often a plant derived ingredient is modified with petroleum or mineral substances.	Used as a cleaning agent or fragrance.	Often a healthier or more environmentally benign alternative to conventional, petroleum derived ingredients used in cleaning products. See cleaning agent, fragrance.
Polyaspartic acid Biodegradable, petroleum-derived, water soluble polymer.	Water Softener and anti-redeposition agent for automatic dishwasher products.	Derived from petroleum and is therefore a non-sustainable, non-renewable resource. Biodegradable. See water softeners, anti-redeposition agent
Polyglucose Mild plant-derived cleaning agent.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Mild, non-toxic, biodegradable. Does not bioaccumulate or harm aquatic life. See nonionic surfactant.
Polyglucoside Mild plant-derived cleaning agent.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Mild, non-toxic, biodegradable. Does not bioaccumulate or harm aquatic life. See Nonionic surfactant; polyglucose.
Potassium hydrate A chemical used as a pH adjuster. Typically used in automatic dishwasher compounds and hard surface cleaners.	Used to maintain the pH of a product.	Severe respiratory irritant and corrosive to eyes and skin. May cause gene mutations that could result in cancer. Low toxicity in aquatic organisms.
Potassium sorbate Paraben free food-grade preservative.	Prevents the growth of bacteria, yeast or fungi in a product.	Generally recognized as safe by the FDA. Non-toxic, non-irritating, biodegradable. See preservative.

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
PPG-10-Laureth-7 A low-foaming, plant oil containing, nonionic surfactant for use in automatic dish washers.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Low to moderate toxicity. Biodegradable. See cleaning agent; nonionic surfactant.
PPG-4-Laureth-8 A low-foaming, plant oil containing, nonionic surfactant for use in automatic dish washers.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Low to moderate toxicity. Biodegradable. See cleaning agent; nonionic surfactant.
PPG-6 C12-15-Pareth-12 A low-foaming, plant oil containing, nonionic surfactant for use in automatic dish washers.	Helps water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Low to moderate toxicity. Biodegradable. See cleaning agent; nonionic surfactant.
Preservative Ingredients that prevent the growth of bacteria, yeast or fungi in a product.	Preservatives are used to maintain the integrity of the product and to prevent microbial contamination and growth.	Look for an ingredient list identifying the preservatives used. Natural preservatives are preferred to synthetic preservatives. See natural, synthetic.
Protease Non-animal derived enzyme commonly used in dishwashing and laundry detergents.	Used to dissolve protein soils from dishes and fabrics.	Protease is eliminated after it acts on soils and is therefore safe for humans and does not persist in the environment. Some individuals show skin sensitivity to enzymes. See enzymes.
Purified water Water prepared to certain specifications. This may be simple filtration, deionization, or a more sophisticated process.	To eliminate bacteria or minerals that could interfere with the performance of a cleaning product.	
Readily biodegradable Indicates that the product or ingredients in the product will biodegrade in the environment at a rapid rate.	Readily biodegradable means an ingredient or product reached 60% degradation in 28 days in a laboratory test.	Choosing readily biodegradable products is better for the environment. See biodegradable.
Renewable resources A resource that can renew or replace itself and, therefore, with proper management, can be harvested indefinitely. Examples are bamboo, water, wind, and solar energy.	The use of renewable resources assures that we will not deplete the earth's resources and put a burden on future generations that inhabit the earth.	Compared to non-renewable resources, if managed properly, renewable resources cannot be used up. Therefore consumption of such resources will not result in depletion of our natural resources.
Residue See chemical residue.		
SD alcohol See alcohol.		
Signal words Words used to describe the level of hazard of a given product and include the words "Danger", "Warning", and "Caution". Products that are labeled Danger are the highest in hazard and should be avoided. Products with the Caution or Warning label are lower in hazard.		See danger, warning, caution.
Silicate salts See sodium silicate.		
SLS An anionic surfactant commonly used in detergents, household cleaners, soaps and shampoos.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Biodegradable. Irritating to the skin when used alone but can be formulated to be non-irritating. See surfactants.
Sodium aluminosilicate Naturally-derived mineral used in automatic dishwasher and laundry applications	Used to remove minerals from water.	Non-toxic, biodegradable, not harmful to aquatic life. See water softeners.
Sodium benzoate Food-grade preservative.	Prevents the growth of bacteria, yeast, or fungi in a product.	Generally recognized as safe. Biodegradable. Not carcinogenic. In soft drinks, has been shown to combine with ascorbic acid to form extremely small quantities of benzene, a known human carcinogen. See preservative.

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
Sodium bicarbonate Also known as baking soda, it is a mineral-derived ingredient used as a abrasive, deodorizer, skin protectant or an oral care agent. Commonly used in detergents, hand dish soap, and personal care products.	Can be used for abrading, smoothing or polishing OR to reduce or eliminate unpleasant odors and to protect against the formation of such odors on the skin OR to polish the teeth, reduce oral odor, or otherwise cleanse or deodorize the teeth and mouth OR to temporarily protect injured or exposed skin from harmful or annoying stimuli and may provide relief to such skin.	Generally recognized as safe. Slightly irritating to skin and eyes at high concentrations. Non-toxic to aquatic life.
Sodium bisulfite A preservative and antioxidant commonly used in detergents, hand dish soap, and personal care products.	Used to prevent microbial growth OR to prevent or slow product deterioration.	Skin and eye irritant. Animal evidence for gene mutations that could result in cancer, although no evidence in humans. Biodegradable, but products of degradation are toxic to the environment and human health.
Sodium borate A compound of boron, sodium, and oxygen with a wide array of cosmetic, cleaning, and industrial uses. Naturally obtained as the mineral borax.	Water Softener: provides pH balance and enzyme stability.	Although sodium borate is acutely non-toxic and not carcinogenic, recently concerns have arisen that sodium borate may be a male reproductive toxicant, with high levels of exposure resulting in reduced sperm counts.
Sodium carbonate Mineral-derived alkalinity builder. Also called washing soda or soda ash.	Mineral-derived Alkalinity builder helps achieve target pH for enhanced cleaning performance; Water Softener to remove water hardness.	Low acute toxicity. Not chronically toxic. High concentrations can be irritating to skin and eyes.
Sodium chloride Also known as table salt, it is a mineral-derived ingredient used to thicken products. Commonly used in detergents, hand dish soap, liquid laundry soaps, and fabric softeners.	Used to increase the thickness of a product.	Non-toxic. Biodegradable. Low acute toxicity. Not chronically toxic. High concentrations can be irritating to skin and eyes.
Sodium citrate A chemical used to maintain product appearance and prevent product deterioration, adjust pH, or exfoliate the skin. Commonly used in automatic dishwashing compounds.	Used to bind metal ions to prevent products from becoming cloudy or discolored OR help remove dead skin cells from the skin surface OR help maintain product pH.	Slightly irritating to the eyes and skin. May increase sensitivity to the sun when used at high concentrations. Biodegradable in soil and water and does not build up in living organisms. Not acutely toxic or chronically toxic. Used as a replacement for phosphates because sodium citrate does not promote eutrophication. See eutrophication, sodium orthophosphate.
Sodium disilicate See sodium silicate.		
Sodium dodecylbenzenesulfonate A chemical used as a surfactant in detergents and hand dish soap.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away.	Slightly irritating to skin and eyes. Does not accumulate in living organisms. Does not biodegrade in water or soil.
Sodium gluconate A soil redeposition agent derived from corn starch.	Used to prevent soil from redepositing on cleaned fabrics or dishes.	Biodegradable. Non-toxic. See anti-redeposition agent.
Sodium hydroxide Also called caustic soda or lye, it is a chemical used as a pH adjuster. Commonly used in automatic dishwashing compounds.	Used to maintain the pH of a product.	High concentrations can be corrosive to skin and eyes. Sodium hydroxide made with older, mercury cell technology pollutes the environment with mercury. Therefore Seventh Generation uses only newer, membrane technology. See caustic soda.
Sodium hypochlorite hypochlorous acid, or chlorine bleach, is used as a bleaching agent or as a disinfectant.	Used to whiten or decolorize materials OR to remove microorganisms from a surface.	Severe skin, eye and respiratory irritant. Corrosive to lungs. Lung sensitizer. May cause gene mutations that could result in cancer. See corrosive, sensitizer.
Sodium lauraminopropionate A plant-derived chemical used to remove dirt and soils and commonly found in detergents and household cleaners.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms.
Sodium lauryl ether sulfate See sodium laureth sulfate.		

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
Sodium lauryl sulfate See SLS.		
Sodium laureth sulfate A plant-derived chemical used to remove dirt and soils commonly found in detergents and household cleaners. Also called SLES.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be rinsed away OR to help a product foam or make foam last longer OR to increase the thickness of a product.	Low acute oral toxicity. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms. 1,4-Dioxane, a probable human carcinogen, is a manufacturing by-product of SLES. Seventh Generation specifies that levels of this contaminant be kept at levels 10-times lower than those found in conventional products. See surfactants.
Sodium magnesium silicate A mineral-derived substance that modifies surfaces to promote water sheeting.	Anti-spotting agent in automatic dishwasher products.	Low acute toxicity and not chronically toxic.
Sodium orthophosphate A mineral-derived chemical that binds metal ions to maintain product appearance and prevent product deterioration, prevent corrosion of metals or maintain product pH.	Used to prevent the rusting of metal used in product packaging or that the product come into contact with OR bind metal ions to maintain product appearance and prevent product deterioration OR help maintain product pH.	Irritating to skin and eyes, skin sensitizer. Extremely damaging to the environment because it can cause eutrophication. See eutrophication.
Sodium percarbonate A chemical that provides the detergent with an all-fabric bleaching action for stain and soil removal. A type of oxygen bleach.	Used to whiten or decolorize materials OR to remove microorganisms from a surface.	Low acute toxicity but may be irritating to eyes or skin at high concentrations. Biodegradable. Toxic to aquatic life. Does not build up in living organisms.
Sodium polyacrylate Petroleum-derived, water soluble polymer.	Used to remove minerals from water OR to prevent redeposition of soils on clean dishes or fabrics.	Low acute toxicity. Not biodegradable. See water softeners, anti-redeposition agent.
Sodium silicate A mineral-derived ingredient used as a pH adjuster, to prevent the corrosion of metals, bind metal ions to maintain product appearance and prevent product deterioration, disperse particles, or cause oil and water to mix. Commonly used in automatic dishwasher compounds.	Used to help maintain the pH of a product OR prevent the rusting of metals that the product may come into contact with or are used in product packaging ORto stabilize particles in a liquid OR to cause water and oil to mix.	Low acute toxicity but may be irritating to eyes or skin. Harmful if swallowed or inhaled. Harmful to aquatic life.
Sodium sulfate A mineral-derived chemical used as a thickener in cleaners, soaps, and detergents.	Used to increase the thickness of a product.	Generally recognized as non-toxic, but hazardous to eyes and slightly hazardous to skin. Is toxic to animal fetuses, but no evidence in humans exists. Does not build up in living organisms.
Sodium sulfate anhydrous See sodium sulfate.		
Sodium xylenesulfonate A chemical used as a surfactant, thickener or solublizer commonly found in personal care products, detergents and dish soaps.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be washed away OR to thicken a product OR to help keep products clear or transparent.	Exhibits low toxicity, but may be toxic to the liver. Slightly irritating to the eyes and skin. Biodegradable. Not toxic to aquatic life.
Soil anti-redeposition agent See anti-redeposition agent.		
Solvent An substance used to dissolve another substance.	Used to dissolve soils to improve cleaning, especially in hard surface cleaners.	May be a synthetic substance such as butoxyethanol or a natural substance such as d-limonene. See ingredient label for more information. It is your right to know what is in the products you purchase, if undisclosed call the company for contents.
Sorbitol A sugar derived from corn starch.	Soil dispersant.	Low acute oral toxicity and not irritating. Biodegradable. Does not build up in living organisms.
Stabilizer An additive ensuring the constancy of a chemical.	Typically added to reactive substances such as bleach, which would decompose without a stabilizer.	See ingredient label for more information. It is your right to know what is in the products you purchase, if undisclosed call the company for contents.
Stabilizing agent See stabilizer.		

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
Sugar based bleach activator Initiate the activity of bleaching agents during the wash cycle.	Used to make detergents more effective at lower temperatures.	Low irritation and toxicity. Biodegradable.
Sugar derivatives Chemicals that are derived from sugar used for multiple purposes in household products.	Used to thicken products OR soften skin OR increase the ability to foam OR stabilize a foam OR to help water disperse oil and grease OR prevent moisture loss from a product.	Sugar-derived chemicals are often safer for humans and are better for the environment than synthetic chemicals.
Sugar surfactant Surfactants derived from sugar.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be washed away.	Low irritation and toxicity. Biodegradable. See surfactant.
Surfactants Substances that help dissolve oil in water so that dirt can be readily loosened and removed when cleaning.	Used to help water to mix with oil and dirt so that they can be washed away.	Can represent a large group of different chemicals, the term is often used when the actual ingredients are not listed. Beware of terms that represent a general group of substances and not the actual ingredient being used. It is your right to know what is in the products you purchase, if undisclosed call the company for contents.
Sustainability A method of utilizing a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.		Seventh Generation strives to use renewable resources, such as plant oils, in its products, and is working with agricultural specialists to develop sources of sustainably grown crops to meet its needs today and for the next seven generations. See renewable resource.
Tetra potassium EDTA See EDTA.		
Tocopherol acetate A derivative of Vitamin E. May be obtained synthetically or from natural sources such as soy oil.	Recognized for its skin-healing properties.	Most cleaning products (including Seventh Generation's) do not contain sufficient tocopherol acetate to provide a healing benefit.
Triclosan A synthetic chemical used as a preservative or antimicrobial agent in sanitizers, disinfectants, and dish liquids.	Used to prevent microbial growth OR to kill microorganism.	Irritating to eyes and skin. Has been found in breast milk of persons who use regularly. Causes fetal death in rats. Results in moderate build up in living organisms. Persistent in the environment. Very toxic to aquatic organisms and may cause long-term adverse effects in the aquatic environment.
Triethlene glycol See glycol ether.		
Uncolored A term that implies a product or ingredient is not treated with a dye or occurs naturally without discernable coloration.	Informs consumer that no dyes or pigments are present in a product.	People with sensitive skin are sometimes sensitive to dyes and pigments, so choosing uncolored products decreases the risk of an allergic reaction to colorants. See colorant, artificial color.
Unscented See fragrance, fragrance-free.		
Vegan A term that describes products that contain no animal products of any kind.	To notify consumers that the company is mindful of animal rights and is a cruelty-free product.	See cruelty-free.
Vegan certified A certification indicating that a product contains no animal products. This certification is unregulated by the FDA.	To notify consumers that the company is mindful of animal rights and is a cruelty-free product.	See cruelty-free.
Vegetable derived See Plant derived		See surfactants, plant derived.
VOC An acronym for Volatile Organic Compounds. VOCs, which are carbon-containing substances that emit fumes at room temperature. The term "organic" indicates that the substances contain carbon.	Many VOCs are petroleum derived. Butoxyethanol is a VOC commonly used in hard surface cleaners. Ethanol is also a VOC commonly found in cleaning products. Look for these and other volatile ingredients on the product ingredient list.	VOCs may cause eye, nose, and throat irritation, headaches, loss of coordination, nausea, and damage to liver, kidney, and nervous system. Some can cause cancer in animals; some are suspected or known to cause cancer in humans. Contribute to indoor and outdoor air pollution. See petrochemicals.

Ingredient.	What it is used for.	How it effects you.
Warning A signal word that indicates a product is slightly to moderately toxic if eaten, inhaled, or absorbed through the skin.	To notify consumers that precautions should be taken during use of the product.	Although only moderately toxic, products with a warning on the label may have human health effects. See signal words, caution, danger.
Washing soda See sodium carbonate.		
Water See aqua.		
Water softeners Substances that remove dissolved minerals from hard water.	Hard water reduces the performance of soaps and detergents. Water softeners eliminate minerals in water so soaps and detergents can perform better.	Some water softeners use phosphates which are damaging to sensitive lakes and streams. See eutrophication, sodium orthophosphate.
Xanthan gum A complex sugar produced by microorganisms used to thicken products.	Used to thicken a product to assure proper product dispensing.	Used in foods, cosmetics, and other products because of its low toxicity and its ability to biodegrade.

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