



## Dangers of Restaurant Cleaning Chemicals

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For the past 5 years, the Green Hospitality Initiative (GHI), a program funded by the Environmental Protection Agency under the sponsorship of the New York State Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, has been studying the impact of hazardous restaurant cleaning chemicals on restaurant staff, customers and the greater environment. This article will summarize the key effects of these chemicals and offer alternative options for those owners willing to rethink the way kitchens can be cleaned. For operators who insist on continuing to use the traditional chemicals, we will list ways of minimizing their risks. Finally, we will present specific strategies that businesses in flood zones should strongly consider when handling cleaning chemicals.

Within the hospitality industry, there exists a myth that only the most caustic and highly toxic chemicals are capable of adequately cleaning commercial kitchens. Very often, business owners as well as the lowest paid and least trained staff who directly use these products, have no real understanding of their side effects. Recently, there's been a significant shift in the industry, as a new wave of low and non-toxic highly effective and cost efficient products are making their way into more and more food service operations. As a greater number of consumers and entrepreneurs become educated to the hazards of typical commercial kitchen cleaning products, we believe this alternative movement will continue to grow and eventually be common practice. For those interested in researching effective low and or non-toxic cleaning chemicals, two dependable sources are the EPA's Safer Choice Program and Green Seal approved products. The GHI also provides reliable suppliers to contact through our website (<http://www.nysra.org/?GHI>) or contact us at [asomeck@gmail.com](mailto:asomeck@gmail.com).

### Potential Hazards of Typical Commercial Chemical Cleaning Products

- **Skin Irritation.** Soaps and detergents can cause skin irritation to those using them.
- **Infections.** Broken skin can be infected or burned from hazardous chemicals.
- **Burns.** Chemicals like oven cleaners, drain openers and grill cleaners can cause burns to the skin and eyes as well as respiratory damage.
- **Respiratory Harm.** Chlorine and ammonia, common commercial kitchen chemicals, can cause respiratory, skin and eye irritation and death, especially if they are mixed together. This respiratory harm may also impact the air quality in the dining room and affect consumers.
- **Latex Allergies** Latex gloves are often worn to protect the skin from hazardous chemicals. However, some workers may be allergic to latex, so non-latex gloves are recommended to prevent any allergic reactions.



## What Employers and Employees Can Do to Protect Themselves

As well as minimizing risk, these strategies can also support a stronger financial bottom line if used properly.

- **Use Eco-Friendly Low or Non Toxic Cleaners** They are safer for your guests, employees and the environment.
- **Provide a Thorough and Regularly Reinforced Training Program** This would include emergency procedure training. Also provide any translations necessary
- **Use High Quality Personal Protective Equipment** No inferior dishwashing gloves, goggles or splash aprons should be used
- **Use Automated Chemical Dispensers.** Automatic dispensers ensure employee safety and appropriate chemical concentration.
- **Always Mix Chemicals to Recommended Concentrations** A solution that is too strong can be dangerous and will waste chemicals.
- **Never Mix Chlorine and Ammonia** Mixing these chemicals can create a poisonous gas. Also store these and other non-compatible chemicals separately
- **Read the Labels.** Chemical labels provide proper handling and mixing instructions. Also, familiarize yourself with the Material Safety Data Sheets (*MSDS*) which provide more in-depth handling information.
- **Clearly Label Properly Seal Cleaning Bottles.** Indicate what cleaning solution is in the bottle to avoid the risk of accidentally mixing the wrong chemicals together.
- **Use lower shelves to store chemicals.** Store liquid chemicals on lower shelves to avoid the risk of spills.

## Strategies for Food Operations in Flood Zones

- Use Low or Non Toxic Cleaners
- Have a Well-Practiced Training Program in All Necessary Languages
- Have a Written Emergency Flood Plan that Staff Practices
- Have a Checklist of Where to Put Hazardous Chemicals in the Event of Flooding
- Try to Order and Store Only Minimum Amounts of Hazardous Chemicals at any One Time
- Make Sure all Chemicals are Properly Sealed
- Have Proper High Quality Protective Gear Available
- Have an Emergency Contact List (ei Local Fire Department, Department of Environmental Protection, etc)
- Have Clear and Safe Clean Up Procedures

