

DRYCLEANING & LAUNDRY INSTITUTE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING GUIDE



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Note: This information has been sourced from the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute Encyclopedia which covers all aspects of drycleaning and management.

5.FIVE QUESTIONS ABOUT PERCHLOROETHYLENE DRY CLEANING

CATEGORIES: CUSTOMER SERVICE REGULATORY & LEGISLATIVE

There has been a lot of media attention devoted to perc dry cleaning and the possible risks associated with it. The following Q&A has been put together to give your customers the straight story.

ARE THE CHEMICALS USED IN DRY CLEANING DANGEROUS?

No. It's true that dry cleaning uses solvents or chemicals, and we handle them very carefully. The toxicity of perc, a cleaning solvent used by many dry cleaners, falls in the same low classification as many everyday compounds, including nail polish remover, bleach or household ammonia, gasoline, antifreeze, and other widely used products. Any of these products could be harmful if you drank them or otherwise abused their use- but not when used with every day, normal care.

The industry handles the chemicals used in dry cleaning responsibly and effectively. Thanks to voluntary changes implemented from within the industry itself, over the past 15 years the industry's consumption of perc has decreased by more than 80%. As a result, the drycleaning industry has reduced air emissions from an average plant from 326 gallons per year 25 years ago to an average of 11 gallons per year today- a 96.6% reduction.

Our industry today uses equipment that recycles the solvent in an enclosed, completely sealed process. Any employee exposure to the solvent is minimal, and customers' contact is even more remote since properly dry cleaned and pressed clothes should have no detectable levels of solvent, and therefore would not pose a health risk to humans.

"For a solvent where the best evidence seems to be that it is not a carcinogen, our efforts to be protective anyway are, I believe, extraordinary for any industry, much less a mom-and pop one like ours," said Bill Fisher, CEO of the International Fabricare Institute, the leading association representing professional dry cleaners.

DOES PERC CAUSE CANCER IN HUMANS?

The Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance sponsored a study of Nordic dry cleaning workers, which was published in 2006. The study found "no increased risk of those cancer types previously suggested to be associated with exposure to ...perc." This study overcame limitations of earlier studies that did not take into account exposure to other drycleaning solvents and lifestyle factors such as smoking.

Based on the best available evidence, the International Fabricare Institute believes that perc is unlikely to be a human carcinogen. However, the Industry has-as IFI has recommended-continued to reduce emissions and exposures significantly over the past 20 years, while continuing to push for additional credible scientific studies. Since 1985 the industry has reduced its consumption of perc by more than 90%.

IS THERE A DANGER TO THE PUBLIC FROM WEARING DRY CLEANED CLOTHES?

No. Properly dry cleaned and pressed clothes should have no detectable levels of solvent and therefore would not pose a health risk to humans. Furthermore, the suggestion to air out dry cleaned

clothing before use is unsubstantiated advice that only serves to generate an alarmist attitude among the public.

The International Fabricare Institute tells the public and its affiliated companies that there should be no solvent odor in garments when the customer picks them up, and if there is, the items should be returned to be reprocessed at no charge.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO PERC?

Yes, there are several solvent alternatives. Although some questions have been raised about each of them, all in all, IFI feels these questions have been minor.

The media and environmentalists suggest that wet cleaning, a process that uses water, can replace dry cleaning, but that is just not the case. Wet cleaning is already being used to supplement cleaners use of solvent. Wet cleaning can successfully clean 25-40% of the garments a dry cleaner receives for cleaning without resulting in damage. This percentage increases to 60- 80% if the company invests in specialized finishing equipment and can go higher, but there is a significant increase in labor costs.

In reality, professional cleaning is much more than one process; depending on the fabric and fiber content, an item may be professionally wet cleaned or laundered instead of dry cleaned.

Which process your clothing is cleaned in will depend on the care label and the experience of your dry cleaner. Likewise, which solvent works best for them is up to individual dry cleaners to decide for themselves.

WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE?

The best evidence IFI has seen on perc shows that it is unlikely to be a human carcinogen; current machines virtually eliminate discharge to the environment and perc is still one of the best solvents ever introduced to the drycleaning industry. Given these factors, perc should be available as a choice to cleaners.