

Can my dry cleaning give me cancer?

There has been a lot of negative publicity over the past 20 years about the dangers to humans of the dry cleaning solvent, perchloroethylene (perc). According to the [American Council on Science and Health](#) (ACSH), much of the hype is scientifically unfounded.

PERCHLOROETHYLENE - SAFE USE IN THE DRYCLEANING INDUSTRY

- The dry cleaning industry is a national leader in reducing the use of chemicals and in preventing pollution.
- Perc's "toxicity" falls in the same low classification as many everyday compounds, including household ammonia or bleach, petrol, antifreeze, nail polish remover, 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 everyday, normal care.
- Drycleaners recycle their chemicals and other products.
- Drycleaners and their families work in their plants and have always had a vested interest in maintaining a safe and healthful workplace.
- While one district in California, relying on flawed evidence, has implemented a phase-out of Perc over a 15 year period, other jurisdictions have conducted their own careful evaluations and have come to the opposite conclusion.

FAQ

Q Are the chemicals used in dry cleaning dangerous?

A No. It's true that dry cleaning uses solvents or chemicals, and they need to be handled responsibly. Perc is classified in the same range of many everyday compounds of petrol, nail polish remover and household ammonia and bleach. However, the big difference is that perc is used under very controlled conditions in a dry cleaning shop. Thanks to voluntary changes implemented from within the industry itself, over the past 20 years the industry's consumption of perc has decreased by almost half. The industry today uses equipment that recycles the solvent for reuse. It is an enclosed and sealed process. Exposure of the worker 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.

Q Does perc cause cancer in humans?

A Based on the best available evidence and supported by recent Nordic studies of over 46,000 persons, the Drycleaning Institute of Australia Ltd and other international associations for Professional Dry Cleaners, believe that perc is most unlikely to be a human carcinogen. The industry has continued to reduce emissions and exposures significantly over the past 20 years, while continuing to push for credible scientific studies to resolve these issues and have found there are no studies that link perc exposure directly to an increase of cancers in humans.

Based on the best available evidence and supported by the recent (2005) scientific study in Nordic counties involving 46,000 persons who were laundry and dry cleaning workers from 1970, the conclusion was that there was no evidence to support a higher level of cancer incidence in humans due directly to perc exposure.

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Q Is there a danger from wearing dry cleaned clothes?

A 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. Drycleaning Institute of Australia tells the public and its members 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 the cleaner to be reprocessed at no charge.

Q Are there alternatives to perc?

A Yes, there are alternatives. Some of them are new to the industry, while others, such as wet cleaning, are already being used to supplement dry cleaners' use of solvent. 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 type of fabric, the care label and the experience of your drycleaner. Perc is still one of the best solvents ever introduced to the dry cleaning industry. Given these factors, perc should be available as a choice to cleaners.