

Climate Justice Niagara

Safe Cleaning and Public Health Advice



Faith and the Common Good: *"Do unto the Earth as you would have it do unto you."*

Post COVID-19 regulations may be different from previous times and all cleaning materials used should be selected in accordance with the requirements of current public health measures in high traffic areas.

Suggested reading is found on The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

<https://www.ccohs.ca/images/products/pandemiccovid19/pdf/worship.pdf>

Public Health Ontario

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19%20environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en>

Public Health Canada

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/disinfecting-your-home.html>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/cleaning-disinfecting-public-spaces.html>

In areas that are not regulated by public health then cleaning materials should be as environmentally sustainable as possible. Remember that chemicals used in our church buildings should not be a safety hazard or impinge on air quality. Therefore, no products using artificial scents should be used especially if the chemical ingredients are listed as "scent", "perfume", or "fragrance" - some are known carcinogens and lung irritants. This includes a recommendation to discontinue the use of deodorizers and air fresheners in washrooms. These products are not only scented, but also include chemicals such as benzene, which are toxic. Many products claim to be "green" or "natural" but contain toxic ingredients.

Current **Sanitation and Public Health Department Regulations** apply only to areas involving food preparation. **But this may change Post-COVID.**

Dishes washed in a commercial sanitizer do not require further disinfectant.

Use of Bleach: Currently we are only required to use bleach to sanitize surfaces used for food preparation, in the form of a weak dilution. Bleach is a highly toxic substance, despite its availability and widespread use. **Be careful of overuse in post-COVID times.** More is not better.

- Check the label to see if your bleach is intended for disinfection and has a sodium hypochlorite concentration of 5-6%.

- Ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted
- **Follow manufacturer's instructions** for application and proper ventilation.
- Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.
- **Leave solution** on the surface for **at least 1 minute**.
- Bleach solutions will be effective for disinfection up to 24 hours.
- **To make a bleach solution**, either mix:
 - 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of room temperature water
 - 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of room temperature water
 - **Alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol may also be used.**

It is worth noting that towel dispensers in washrooms may not be sanitary or efficient, such as the ones with a push-down lever as people touch the lever with wet hands. A simpler dispenser with a pull-down roll is more sanitary and easier to use.

Current products in use in the church building should be evaluated using the **Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)** available for all products.

MSDS Sheets are an important safety guide for cleaners and whoever supervises the cleaning. They give information about health hazards, flammability, spill procedures, and reactivity with other materials. They provide a health guide as to what type of precautions and protective clothing should be used with a product.

All products used in the building should have MSDS sheets printed out and available in a prominent place or binder near the first aid box in case of accidents or exposure.

If ingredients are not listed in Section 2 of an MSDS sheet, they are of types and concentrations that are not determined to be hazardous. The manufacturer can be asked for a specific list. Anyone seeking information about any product or ingredient should contact the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety in Hamilton at 905-572-2981 or 1-800-668-4284. <https://www.ccohs.ca/>

The Canadian EcoLogo (also known as Environmental Choice) helps you identify products and services that have been independently certified to meet strict environmental standards that reflect their entire life cycle — from manufacturing to disposal. EcoLogo standards are designed so that only the top 20% of products available on the market can achieve certification. More than 7,000 products — from paint to paper — carry this logo.



This web site - <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/Oca-bc.nsf/eng/ca02523.html> - will give you other Environmental labels and claims to check before you purchase products.

Recommended Suppliers of Safe Cleaning Products in Southern Ontario include:

- Caeran: <https://caeran.com/>
- Simply Clean: <http://www.simply-clean.ca/>
- Eco-Max: <https://eco-max.com/>
- Nature Clean: <https://natureclean.ca/>
- EcoMist Solutions: <https://ecomistsolutions.com/>
- G.T. French (carries Cascades and paper products):
<https://b2b.gtfrench.ca/Content/Default/vsLogin.aspx>

Several large retail stores (Home Depot, Rona, Home Hardware, Fortinos, Canadian Tire) now carry safer cleaning products.

Other simple formulas, such as equal parts of vinegar and water are suitable for some surfaces (washroom tiles and floors). Simplified cleaning methods using vinegar, borax and baking soda also have the advantage of being inexpensive. Some examples are below – and while not all are suitable for churches they may be helpful to give to parishioners for home use as part of the Niagara Home Challenge.

Avoid overuse: The cleaning person should use the minimum amount of a cleaner required to get the job done. More is not better.

Do not use disposables: Disposable mops and Lysol wipes create large amounts of toxic waste.

Cost: It is difficult to predict what the overall cost saving might be but simplifying the number of cleaning materials and procedures should help the budget.

Hiring a Cleaner: In the job description include references to the faith community's desire to be responsible stewards as we strive to care for creation. Whether a janitorial service or an independent cleaner is used it is essential that the cleaner be committed to cleaning the building in a safe and sustainable way and will understand the importance of the health and environmental issues involved.

Examine products now in use: The products currently used in the building should be scrutinized. Many of them likely use petroleum as a major ingredient, some may be fire hazards, or health hazards, and some will require that the worker use personal protection such as mask, protective apron, shoes, and gloves. Most produce carbon dioxide. Many will contain fragrance or scent, substances that are irritating and even hazardous to many people. Protective measures must be followed if the faith community decides to continue to use these materials.

Other Factors Affecting Air Quality: There may be many factors causing compromised air quality in a building. These may include dampness, gas leaks, mold, office chemicals, building and furnishing materials and so on. All these possibilities should be investigated.

Antibacterial Products: These should be avoided because they are thought to contribute to the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Many different groups use the building and may sometimes bring in various supermarket products. It will be important to inform them clearly of any changes in policy regarding products to be used in the church building and to ensure that the chosen materials are clearly labeled and readily accessible to any groups for their use.

Commitment: The commitment of the faith community to green cleaning is of the utmost importance. The choice of products and methods is broad, information is widely available, and the goal of a safe and environmentally friendly worship space is achievable.

Conclusion: The ideology about the need to use toxic materials to clean buildings is changing rapidly, perhaps as a reflection of our awareness of the harm these products can do to humans and the environment. There is a proliferation of green products to choose from, some more green than others. MSDS sheets are useful for evaluating them. Many of the products we use are often too strong and toxic for the relatively straightforward task of keeping our buildings clean. When the use of bleach is necessary ensure that correct dilution of bleach/water is safely carried out.

Environmentally Friendly Cleaning Products

Just by using vinegar, baking soda, borax, salt, washing soda, vegetable based washing up liquid, and lemon means you can clean your house cheaply and safely.

Oven cleaner: Make a paste of baking soda and hot water. Sponge onto stains and wipe clean

Drain opener: Pour half a cup of baking soda into drain. Then pour one cup of white vinegar into the drain. Put in the plug and wait 15 minutes (remember making volcanoes at school!). Flush with very hot water. Repeat this process a few times to unclog or do regularly to keep drains fresh.

Toilet bowl cleaner: Sprinkle baking soda into the bowl. Drizzle with white vinegar, scour with toilet brush.

Disinfectant: Mix half a cup of borax with one gallon of hot water. Add some sprigs of fresh thyme. Steep for 10 minutes, strain and cool. Store in a spray bottle.

Tile cleaner: Mix quarter-cup of vinegar in a gallon of water.

Mirror, tap, and window cleaner: Mix 2 teaspoons of white vinegar with quart of water – store in a spray bottle. Use linen towels or soft cloths to clean.

Floor cleaner: Mix one cup of white vinegar with 2 gallons of hot water. For greasy floors add quarter cup of washing soda and one tablespoon of liquid soap to the mixture.

Basin and tub cleaner: Rub the area to be cleaned with half a lemon dipped in borax. Rinse and dry with a soft cloth. Two alternative ways 1) use a drop of washing-up liquid or 2) or a sprinkle of baking soda and wipe clean with a soft cloth.

Mold and mildew remover: Dissolve half a cup of white vinegar with half a cup of borax in warm water.