Cleaning for Healthier Schools and Asthma Control

Did you know that the products you bring into your classroom may be affecting the health of the students and staff in your school? Is your classroom an asthma control friendly environment?

Common cleaning products contain hazardous chemicals that could be contributing to asthma episodes or new onset asthma.

- A study in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine 2007* found that teachers and teacher’s aides made up 54% of work related asthma cases in four states.
- Air testing in California schools for emissions from cleaning products found they released 457 different chemicals including those identified as asthmagens. Comet Disinfectant Powder Cleanser, Simple Green and Febreeze were among the 21 cleaning products tested. 6 out of the 457 chemicals are known to cause asthma; 11 are known or probable carcinogens and others are respiratory irritants and endocrine disruptors.

What you can do to help reduce asthma triggers in your classroom:

- Use only third-party certified cleaning products supplied by the custodial department and don’t bring in your own products. You are liable if a student is injured by products you bring in. Products used in schools must have material safety data sheets available in case of accident.
- Refrain from using scented products, including air fresheners, hand sanitizers, soaps, markers, perfumes and personal care products. Scented products can cause asthma episodes.
- Leave the disinfecting to the custodial staff, trained in the use of these hazardous products. If you must disinfect in your classroom, use a product approved by your school’s facilities department and only after all students are out of the building. Students should never use disinfectant products. Follow the label directions exactly including the time the wet product should stay on the surface and rinsing if necessary.
- Make sure your room is easy for the custodial staff to clean
  - Store papers and other materials in plastic containers rather than cardboard boxes
  - Leave stuffed animals and upholstered furniture at home
  - Keep your univents clear of plants or papers and easy for the custodial staff to service
- Avoid using toxic white board cleaners and markers. Many schools are using water and microfiber cloths to clean white boards. Less toxic markers are available.
- Prohibit children from using any cleaning products including wipes, which can contain ingredients that are asthmagens.

Common ingredients in cleaning products that can cause new onset asthma or asthma episodes:
Benzalkonium Chlorides, BACs (sometimes listed as quaternary ammonium compounds)
Ethanolamine, diethanolamine, triethanolamine, monoethanolamine
Formaldehyde
Methyl methacrylate
Ortho-phenylphenol (2 phenylphenol)
Styrene

For additional information: