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### Going Green: How to Spring Clean Safely



Spring cleaning is a great way to deep cleanse your home environment, but this process can be quite harmful to the environment, both indoor and outdoor. For example, the cleaning products that you intend to use may contain pollutants like volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that lead to air pollution and cause an array of human and animal health problems (Soni et al., 2018). In the following article, you will find similar examples of how spring cleaning can be environmentally unfriendly along with simple solutions to make it more ecological.

#### ***The Kitchen & The Dining Room***

When cleaning your kitchen, it is recommended that cabinets are emptied so that they can be thoroughly cleaned. When doing so, it is important to keep track of what you own and how many of your items are made of plastic or polluting materials. Plastic items release tiny particles named microplastics that can be ingested by humans and can lead to the disruption of many bodily systems (Prata





et al., 2020). Other polluting materials can be found in non-stick pans and utensils too (Sajid & Ilyas, 2017).

Another important part of kitchen cleaning involves the inspection of the pantry. It is likely that some of the food products are way past their expiration dates. You might also find food that is still edible, but that you do not want. Food waste is a huge problem globally. In Canada alone, the average household wastes 140 kg of food per year, which averages to 2.2 million tonnes when accounting for the entire country (Love Food Hate Waste, 2017). In terms of money, that represents a loss of 17 billion dollars annually!

#### **What to Do:**

- ✓ Switch plastic items with ecological containers and cookware.
- ✓ Compost expired food products.
- ✓ Use up the edible products or donate them to your local food bank.

#### **Useful Resources:**

- [EHAQ – Building a Greener Kitchen](#)
- [EHAQ Eco Living Guide – Healthy Alternatives for Kitchen Utensils](#)
- [Love Food Hate Waste – Food Waste in the Home](#)

### ***The Office***

When organizing the office, you might end up with stacks of paper that are no longer valuable to you. Paper waste adds to landfills, uses large amounts of water, and worsens the problem of deforestation (*The World Counts*, 2021). Thus, besides recycling, individuals should seek additional options to mitigate their use of paper.

#### **What to Do:**

- ✓ Reuse paper that still has blank sides.
- ✓ Buy recycled paper.
- ✓ Shift to digital files using smart technology.
- ✓ Avoid printing unnecessarily.

#### **Useful Resources:**

- [The World Counts – 10 Easy Ways to Reduce Paper Waste & Pollution](#)



## ***The Bathroom***

Cleaning the bathroom will involve the inspection of personal care products and makeup. This is the perfect time to investigate whether or not your products are safe for you and the environment. Beauty care products may contain toxins like phthalates, parabens, siloxanes, triclosan, and many more (EHAQ Newsletter, November 2020). Once again, pay attention to how many products come in plastic containers. In the US, it is estimated that 70% of the plastic used for packaging ends up in landfills (Borunda, 2019).

### **What to Do:**

- ✓ Check for toxins in your products by doing a quick online search.
- ✓ In the future, aim to buy products from ecological brands.

### **Useful Resources:**

- [EHAQ – Beauty Products for Skin & Hair](#)
- [EHAQ Eco Living Guide – Personal Hygiene](#)

## ***The Bedroom***

One of the main cleaning tasks in the bedroom involves sorting through the closet. This often involves discarding clothing articles; however, this can be quite wasteful. As a fact, the average Canadian throws out 81 pounds of textiles each year, and the majority of this number ends up in landfills (Sun, 2018).

Cleaning the bedroom should also include a quick inspection of your furniture, pillows, mattresses, and linens. These common bedroom items can contain toxins like volatile organic compounds, phthalates, and flame retardants amongst other chemicals (Boor et al., 2015). Importantly, prolonged exposure to such chemicals can cause negative effects on health.

### **What to Do:**

- ✓ Reuse, recycle, or donate unwanted clothes.
- ✓ Make a note to buy less clothing and/or opt for thrift shopping.
- ✓ Switch to healthier alternatives for common bedroom items.

### **Useful Resources:**

- [EHAQ – Safe Bedroom for Your Baby](#)
- [EHAQ – Going Green: Your Bedroom](#)
- [EHAQ Eco Living Guide – Furniture](#)
- [EHAQ – How to Choose Healthy Furniture](#)

## ***The Garage***

The garage is perhaps one of the least safe room in the house because it stores a bunch of products like car oils, paint cans, pesticides, engine fluids, and industrial cleaners amongst other hazardous products. The garage also has direct access to the outside, thus proper insulation is crucial to avoid external particles to enter your home, but also to control your home temperature (Murphey, 2020).

### **What to Do:**

- ✓ Remove old hazardous substances – contact your municipal waste disposal.
- ✓ Ensure that containers are properly sealed to prevent toxins from infiltrating indoor air.
- ✓ Insulate any cracks that allow outside air/waste to leak into your home.
- ✓ If your garage is attached to your home, do not park your car in your garage as noxious gases can enter the home through tiny cracks.

### **Useful Resources:**

- [Biofriendly Planet – How to Make Your Garage Greener](#)



### **Electricals: Appliances & Lightbulbs**

It is important that you check appliances, lightbulbs, and outlets. Many appliances can be wasting energy simply by being plugged into an outlet (Vadim, 2020). You must also check whether your appliances are ecological. Moreover, the inspection of electricals can also include switching defective lightbulbs. Unfortunately, not all lightbulbs are made equally. For example, incandescent bulbs drain more energy than they produce good lighting (Energy Saver). As an alternative, LED bulbs are much more energy-efficient as they use less electricity and last longer.

#### **What to Do:**

- ✓ Unplug appliances that you do not use.
- ✓ Switch to eco-friendly lightbulbs.
- ✓ Take the opportunity to learn about your appliances in terms of energy usage and eco-friendliness.

### **A General Note on Cleaning Products, Supplies, and Cautions**

Many cleaning products can be harmful as they can contain chemicals dangerous to human health as well as the environment. Visit [www.ecolivingguide.ca](http://www.ecolivingguide.ca) (also linked in the table below) to see an extensive list of healthy alternatives for many household products.

#### **What to Do:**

- ✓ Use old clothes instead of paper towels to reduce waste.
- ✓ Use nontoxic and biodegradable cleaning products.
- ✓ Be conscious of your water use when cleaning and fill up buckets instead of running water continuously.
- ✓ Wear a mask when dusting and sweeping.

#### **Useful**

#### **Resources:**

- [EHAQ Eco Living Guide – Housekeeping](#)

## Closing Tips

- Inspect all of your products and keep track of how many are wasteful.
- For each toxic product, write down a healthier alternative. Use this list for shopping!
- Use up products before shifting to more ecological options, especially if they pose no immediate danger to your health. This prevents producing waste.
- Recycle or donate unwanted items whenever possible.
- Make notes for your future self to create a greener home.



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