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## Home Air Fresheners May Emit VOCs

*Calling Out Greenwashers and How to Find Safe Scented Products*

By Maryruth Belsey Priebe

June 6th 2011

Your favorite scented products may be polluting your [indoor air](#) – even the ones you may have thought to be more natural. Survey results show that even fragranced products advertised as “natural” or “organic” may be laced with [volatile organic compounds \(VOCs\)](#), according to a new article titled [“Fragranced consumer products: chemicals emitted, ingredients unlisted.”](#)

Using a process called gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, scientists tested 25 air fresheners, fabric softeners, disinfectants, laundry detergents, cleaners, soaps, dryer sheets, lotions, shampoos, and hand sanitizers to determine whether they emitted VOCs. A breakdown of the findings regarding VOCs in these products looks like this:

- 133 unique VOCs identified among 25 products
- 24 of these are classified as toxic or hazardous under at least one federal law

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- Only 1 of the 133 VOCs identified was listed on any label
- Only 2 of the 133 VOCs identified were listed on any MSDS
- On average, the products tested emitted 17 VOCs
- The most commonly detected VOCs were **limonene**, **ethanol**, and **acetone**
- 50% of the products tested emitted 1 of 4 carcinogenic air pollutants (**acetaldehyde**, **1,4-dioxane**, **formaldehyde**, and **methylene chloride**) for which there is no safe level, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency[1]

VOCs like those studied in this survey can contribute to a variety of human and environmental health problems. In particular, people often complain of symptoms such as skin irritation, respiratory issues, neurological problems, and headaches when using scented products.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for consumers looking for low-VOC products is the fact that no agency in the US requires that these products list their ingredients (though the US Food and Drug Administration does require the term “fragrance” to be listed on personal care products), and most do not do so voluntarily. That makes it very challenging to know which consumer goods – whether they’re labeled “natural,” “organic,” or “green” – are safe for indoor quality and which are not.

## How to keep VOCs out of your home

So if you can’t tell a truly safe scented product from one with dubious marketing claims, how do you ensure that your **indoor air quality** isn’t compromised? There are many things you can do to prevent indoor air pollution:

- Use safe products during your home renovation projects
- Make your own homemade air fresheners
- Choose plants that will purify your indoor air
- Make your own natural laundry detergents and **homemade fabric softeners**
- Make your own cleaning products
- Create your own natural skincare and **homemade facial care** products

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## References

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