

# Can Your Window Cleaner Cause Cancer?

One of the most ominous secrets today about household cleaning products is that a synthetic chemical commonly used in their formulas has shown some evidence of carcinogenicity. The secret has been deeply buried throughout the years in a little publicized March 2000 technical report from the National Toxicology Program. While the report represents only a first step in the scientific research, its findings represent what could be the beginning of the end of this chemical in consumer products—either leading to a more definitive future classification or its complete elimination—which might be the better solution.

The chemical has a lot of aliases and is known as butyl cellosolve, 2-butoxyethanol, ethylene glycol monobutyl ether (EGMBE or EGBE) or as a member of the family known as ethylene glycol monoalkyl ethers. Butyl cellosolve is in a lot of popular brands of window and all-purpose cleaners. It is used extensively as a solvent in surface coatings such as lacquers, enamels, varnishes, and latex paint; in paint thinners, paint stripping formulations, and inks; and in degreasers and industrial and household cleaners.

In the study, it was found that, "There was equivocal evidence of carcinogenic activity of 2-butoxyethanol in female rats and female and male mice based on the increased incidences of benign or malignant pheochromocytoma of the adrenal medulla, hemangiosarcoma of the liver and fore stomach squamous cell papilloma or carcinoma."

When a chemical causes cancer in both sexes of two species of animals or more it is generally thought of as being a potential carcinogen (its final classification is based on a sophisticated review of many additional studies and evidence). So—this chemical is very close.

But there's more frightening news. In a December 1998 article in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, doctors treated seven clerical workers after exposure to vaporized 2-butoxyethanol, which had been applied overnight to strip the floor of their file room. At the time of exposure, they had noted intense eye and respiratory irritation, marked dyspnea, nausea, and faintness. All

seven workers later experienced recurrent eye and respiratory irritation, dry cough, and headache. Four months after the exposure, cherry angiomas (benign tumors that are made up of small blood vessels or lymph vessels) began to appear on the

arms, trunk, and thighs of six workers, who voiced concerns about the possibility of cancer. New cherry angiomas have continued to appear 5 years after the acute exposure, as the initial ones persisted. "These angiomas occur in healthy persons as they age but in this instance appear to have resulted from a single overexposure to 2-butoxyethanol."

The scary thing is millions of homemakers, janitors and other folks are using this chemical today, not fully realizing their harmful effects. The brand of window cleaner most closely associated with its use is Windex. But many other products, including Fantastik, Formula 409, Lysol and Simple Green formulas also contain this chemical. These products also transmit what are called volatile organic chemicals that become airborne and can be inhaled 24/7 in the home.

## THE BETTER CHOICE

You don't have to buy products with this chemical to get perfectly clean, clear and streak-free windows. We've put a lot of different cleaners to the test and while Windex no doubt does a great job on your windows, other cleaners we have tested do just as well without having to use what appears to be a highly toxic chemical where even low chronic doses might present an unnecessary risk.

With all of this in mind, your clear choice for all-around performance and value has become relatively easy: Earth Friendly Products has tested free of not only this chemical, but all petrochemicals including dioxane and formaldehyde. Their products are available everywhere. They work just as well (we know as we've tested them). They're comparably priced. AND, they end up protecting you and your family—what could be better? ■

## The Green Shopper



## Resources

Earth Friendly Products, including their window cleaner and all-surface cleaner, as well as their Wave automatic dish-washing gel and ECOS laundry detergent, are the smart, green choice. They don't contain phosphates, dioxane, or any other chemical toxins. Visit them at [www.ecos.com](http://www.ecos.com) and [www.efpclean.com](http://www.efpclean.com).



## References

1. *Natl Toxicol Program Tech Rep Ser.* 2000 Mar;484:1-290.
2. *J Occup Environ Med.* 1998 Dec;40(12):1059-64.