

The Household Product Labeling Act of 2009 will require companies list ingredients in cleaning products, air fresheners and paints on the product or its packaging

Washington, DC – Wednesday, Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) announced the launch of their joint efforts to protect consumers by requiring ingredient labeling for household products such as cleaners, air fresheners and paints. The Household Product Labeling Act of 2009, which was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Franken on Wednesday (S.1697) and the House by Rep. Israel in June (H.R.3057), requires companies list all product ingredients clearly on the product or product packaging.

“Moms and dads have a right to know whether harmful chemicals are present in their kitchen cupboards,” said Sen. Franken. “When my wife Franni and I were raising our own kids, we were constantly concerned with what we used to wash their cribs, their pacifiers, the floors, and surfaces they played on. This is just a common-sense measure to help parents keep their kids safe and healthy.”

“Every day we use basic household products to clean our counters and wash our dishes, yet current federal law doesn’t give us the right to know what harmful chemicals those products might contain,” said Rep. Israel. “Consumers have a right to protect their families and that means knowing what’s in our household products. This is a bill about defending consumers, protecting our children, and keeping our homes safe.”

Current law requires that product labels list immediately hazardous ingredients, but there is no labeling requirement for ingredients that may cause harm over time. Many chemicals contained in household products have been shown to produce harmful health effects and many ingredients that are safe for most people can be major irritants for children with asthma. This legislation makes information readily available to consumers, giving them the opportunity to make an informed choice about the chemicals they bring into their homes.

A list of examples of potentially dangerous chemicals from “Household Hazards,” a report by Women’s Voices for the Earth (2007), includes:

- Monoethanolamine (MEA) is a surfactant found in some laundry detergents, all-purpose cleaners and floor cleaners and is a known inducer of occupational asthma.
- Ammonium quaternary compounds are disinfectants found in some disinfectant sprays and toilet cleaners that have been identified as inducers of occupational asthma.
- Glycol ethers, such as 2-butoxyethanol, are solvents commonly found in glass cleaners and all-purpose spray cleaners that have been linked to reduced fertility and low birth weight in exposed mice.

- Alkylphenol ethoxylates (APEs) are surfactants found in laundry detergents, stain removers, and all-purpose cleaners, which have been found to reduce embryo survival in fish, and alter tadpole development. APEs are commonly detected as contaminants in rivers and streams – including in the Long Island Sound, and have also been found in household dust.
- Phthalates are carriers for fragrance in glass cleaners, deodorizers, laundry detergents and fabric softeners, which have been linked to adverse effects on male children, reduced sperm count in adult men, and increased allergic symptoms and asthma in children.

According to a recent study by the Center for the New American Dream, the institutional cleaning industry uses an estimated five billion pounds of chemicals annually in the United States.