



A prospective buyer visited the Colby Glass booth during the Better Home and Living Show last year.

## Soften your clothes without harsh chemicals

From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine

Dear EarthTalk: Which is better for our environment: to use dryer sheets in the dryer or liquid fabric softener in the wash? It seems they both have properties that are not very green. — Deborah, via e-mail

If you're concerned about the health and safety of your family members, you might want to stay away from both conventional dryer sheets and liquid fabric softeners altogether. While it may be nice to have clothes that feel soft, smell fresh and are free of static cling, both types of products contain chemicals known to be toxic to people after sustained exposure.

According to the health and wellness website Sixwise.com, some of the most harmful ingredients in dryer sheets and liquid fabric softener alike include benzyl acetate (linked to pancreatic cancer), benzyl alcohol (an upper respiratory tract irritant), ethanol (linked to central nervous system disorders), limonene (a known carcinogen) and chloroform (a neurotoxin and carcinogen), among others.

Since fabric softeners are designed to stay in your clothes for extended periods of time, such chemicals can seep out gradually and be inhaled or absorbed directly through the skin. Liquid fabric softeners are slightly prefer-

able to dryer sheets, as the chemicals in dryer sheets get released into the air when they are heated up in the dryer and can pose a respiratory health risk to those both inside and outside the home.

For those who don't want to give up the benefits of fabric softeners but are afraid to risk exposure to potentially toxic chemicals, National Geographic's Green Guide recommends adding either a quarter cup of baking soda or a quarter cup of white vinegar to the wash cycle. Either one will soften clothes, while the latter will also address static cling. (Be sure not to mix either with bleach, though, as resulting chemical reactions could cause noxious fumes.) If eliminating static cling is your top priority, try drying natural-fiber clothes separately from synthetics. The combination of cotton and polyester is often the culprit behind static cling. Better yet, reports Green Guide, line dry synthetic clothing, as it tends to dry fairly quickly anyway.

A few companies have heeded the ever-increasing call for greener, safer ways to soften clothes and reduce static cling. Seventh Generation's Natural Lavender Scent Fabric Softener and Ecover's Natural Fabric Softener are both good choices that rely on vegetable products and natural essential oils instead of harsh chemicals to get the job done.

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