



# Design for the Environment Dry Cleaning Project



## What Is Design for the Environment?

The Design for the Environment (DfE) Program in EPA's Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics harnesses EPA's expertise and leadership to facilitate information exchange and research on pollution prevention efforts. DfE works with both large and small businesses on a voluntary basis, and its wide-ranging projects include:

- Changing general businesses practices to provide incentives for pollution prevention efforts.
- Working with businesses and trade associations in specific industries to evaluate the risks, performance, and costs of alternative chemicals, processes, and technologies.
- Helping individual businesses undertake environmental design efforts through the application of specific tools and methods.

## Cleaner Clothes, Cleaner Neighborhoods, Cleaner Solutions

### Why Is EPA Working With Dry Cleaners?

EPA has been working with the dry cleaning industry for some time to reduce exposure to perchloroethylene, often referred to as "perc." Perc is a chemical solvent used by most dry cleaners. With more than 31,000 commercial shops in neighborhoods and malls across the country, dry cleaners make up one of the largest groups of chemical users that come into direct contact with the public. Because of the potential health and environmental concerns associated with the use of perc, EPA is now working in partnership with the dry cleaning industry to reduce exposures and to evaluate alternatives through its Design for the Environment (DfE) Program.

### What Is EPA Doing About Dry Cleaning?

In May 1992, EPA invited dry cleaning industry representatives, researchers, and government officials to an international roundtable discussion. The roundtable participants exchanged information about many issues related to the dry cleaning industry, including pollution control, exposure reduction, financing options, regulatory activities in the United States and other countries, and information dissemination. At a wrap-up session, participants listed issues that need to be addressed through research initiatives and future discussion forums.



As a followup to the roundtable, EPA decided to apply the "design for the environment" approach to working cooperatively with the dry cleaning industry. Industry leaders and EPA agreed that unresolved issues from the roundtable could be addressed most effectively using DfE's nonregulatory, voluntary, and proactive approach. In addition to investigating cleaner options, the DfE Program provides outreach to dry cleaners and consumers.

A major piece of the dry cleaning project is DfE's Cleaner Technologies Substitutes Assessment (CTSA), a collaborative effort between EPA and the dry cleaning industry. Through the CTSA, EPA is systematically examining a number of alternative cleaning technologies, substitute solvents, and methods to control and limit chemical exposure from dry cleaning.

For alternative cleaning processes that appear viable, EPA will evaluate each option as it compares to dry cleaning, primarily based on cost and performance, but also considering factors such as energy input and resource conservation. The CTSA also will weigh "tradeoffs," the pros and cons of competing environmental objectives, to help dry cleaners make informed business choices. As part of the CTSA, EPA recently compared the costs and performance of dry cleaning against an alternative cleaning process that relies on the controlled application of heat, steam, and natural soaps to clean clothes that typically are drycleaned.

At the conclusion of the CTSA, EPA plans to publish a technical summary of alternative technologies, solvents, and processes. EPA also will produce an informational document for industry and the public that will communicate cost-effective, environmentally safer choices discovered as a result of this public/private partnership.

## How Does the Dry Cleaning Project Affect Me?

By joining DfE in its commitment to finding safer, cleaner technologies, dry cleaners can maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace. In addition, the information from the project will help dry cleaners

in their desire to be good neighbors. With an enhanced awareness of available technological options, dry cleaners can improve their operations and bottom line, while contributing to a cleaner environment. As consumers increasingly tend to opt for "green," environmentally sound products and services, dry cleaners that consider the health and environmental impacts of their business decisions are more likely to sustain solid customer support.

Like businesspeople, consumers also benefit from understanding how their everyday choices affect the environment. Consumers today face an ever-widening array of products and services from which to choose. As people understand better how a product's design and manufacturing process affects the environment, they will be able to make responsible decisions that benefit them, their families, and their community.

## How Can I Get More Information?

To learn more about EPA's Design for the Environment Program or its Dry Cleaning Project, contact:

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