

# Americans Need a National Standard for Cleaning Product Disclosure

By Steve Caldeira

Americans are cleaning and disinfecting surfaces more than ever due to COVID-19. But the need for good hygiene will not fade even when the coronavirus does. Consumers are carefully reading labels to better understand what ingredients make up their cleaning products – information they deserve to know.

Unfortunately, the U.S. does not have a national standard for ingredient disclosure. For the good of everyone, it is time for Congress to work with all sides to find a unified federal solution.

The de facto model of ingredient disclosure was enacted in California in 2017. The aptly named Cleaning Product Right to Know Act requires the makers of cleaners and disinfectants to put ingredients both online and on package labels. The law works because it balances the desire for consumer information with the need to protect confidential business information. Many manufacturers and retailers are already using California as the template for disclosure on products across the country.

The reason: California is so large that its regulations often become the national standard absent a federal mandate. It is simply impractical for manufacturers to conform their practices to California alone and to follow other rules elsewhere.

California's disclosure law has been widely praised. More than 100 organizations and corporations supported it, including breast cancer and clean water advocates, janitorial and domestic worker unions, and some of the world's largest cleaning product companies, represented by the Household and Commercial Products Association. A similarly diverse group should put their heads together in Washington, D.C., to find a standard that works for the entire country, hopefully using the California statute as its starting point.

Scientifically sound cleaning products are critical to public health and, when used properly, can reduce the risk of exposure to viruses. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has made clear that only certain products are effective against viruses, including SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The EPA's list of these products can be found [here](#).

It is time for the federal government to approve a national standard for disclosing the ingredients in these vital products.

But New York State is working on a different set of rules, which is delaying the chance for consumers to know the ingredients of the vital cleaning products they use every day. In general, piecemeal solutions confuse people and provide uneven and sometimes imperfect disclosures.

In the case of New York, the direction its officials are going will be difficult if not impossible for manufacturers to follow. New York's proposed regulations require disclosure of ingredients

below levels that technology can measure for theoretical contaminants. They also do not provide the flexibility or intellectual property protections that make California's law such a strong standard.

Indeed, transparent and consistent communication of ingredients helps consumers make informed decisions and feel confident about the products they use, but this consistency across state lines can only be dictated by the U.S. government.

Wedging such legislation into an already crowded congressional agenda will not be easy, but it is necessary. The private sector is already heading that way.

Walmart, the world's largest brick-and-mortar retailer, is voluntarily following California's law because it meets Walmart's own disclosure requirements for cleaning products. If a national standard embraced California's standard for ingredient disclosure, the makers of cleaners and disinfectants would save millions of dollars in packaging costs because they would have a single rather than multiple mandates to follow. Consumers would be the biggest beneficiaries because they would always be able to know what ingredients are in these important products.

So far, though, the disagreement between California and New York has been holding lawmakers back. Consumers and businesses deserve better. Lawmakers should approve a federal standard based on California's successful law – and soon.

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