THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ANTIMICROBIAL PESTICIDES AND GENERAL PURPOSE CLEANERS

With the variety of cleaning products on the market today, it can be hard to tell the difference between all of them; but not all products in the cleaning aisle are equal!

Many people do not realize that products labeled as sanitizers and disinfectants are actually antimicrobial pesticides. Because they are pesticides, they are regulated by federal and state laws. It is very important to pay close attention when using them.

So, what is the difference between cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting?

Cleaning: physically removes dirt, grime, oils, and some germs from a surface.

Sanitizing: reduces germs on surfaces to levels considered "safe" by public health authorities.

Disinfecting: chemically destroys or inactivates almost all germs on a surface.

Cleaning products that are not antimicrobial pesticides are general purpose cleaners. These help break up grime and films to clean surfaces more easily. You can reduce pesticide use by choosing to clean without antimicrobial pesticides when killing germs is not necessary.

"Keep Out of Reach of Children"
is not a suggestion. Students should only help clean with diluted soap and water.

How to tell the difference between antimicrobial pesticides and general purpose cleaners.

You may think antimicrobial pesticide products are the same as general purpose cleaners because you can find them near each other in store aisles; but they are different products. **Antimicrobial pesticides specifically say on the label that they kill germs**. General purpose cleaner labels make no mention of killing germs, but use language that says they help "clean" or "remove" soil and stains.

Look for these differences on product labels:

Antimicrobial Pesticides	General Purpose Cleaners
Makes pesticidal claims on the label Ex. "disinfectant," "sanitizer"	Makes no mention of germs Ex. "cleans," "removes, "whitens"
Use to kill germs on a contaminated surface	Use to remove debris and marks
Has instructions to kill germs	No instructions to kill germs
EPA registration number on label	No EPA registration number
Use when intent is to disinfect or sanitize	Use only to clean surfaces

Unless you need to sanitize or disinfect, consider using a general purpose cleaner or soap and water instead!

California School & Child Care IPM

Use antimicrobial pesticides only when and where they are necessary.

Antimicrobial pesticides are the number one cause of pesticide-related workplace injuries. If someone gets hurt when using them, investigations and penalties may result. Saving antimicrobial pesticides for their intended purpose — sanitizing or disinfecting high touch or contaminated surfaces —is the best way to reduce the risks associated with pesticide use.

To kill germs safely, you must follow all directions on the label. This includes pre-cleaning, contact time requirements, rinsing instructions, and wearing personal protective equipment, like gloves. Ignoring these steps could mean increasing your risk of illness or injury. Directions are not "suggestions," they are there for a reason. **Always read the label**, **the label is the law.**

Choose products that contain lower-risk ingredients.

No products used to clean, sanitize, or disinfect are completely without risk. Because they are chemical solutions, most antimicrobial pesticides are required to have a signal word that will tell you how toxic a product is. Products with no signal word are the least toxic.

Toxicity Level	Signal Word
Lowest	None
Low	Caution
Moderate	Warning
High	Danger Danger: POISON Danger: CORROSIVE

Choosing unscented products can help reduce indoor asthma and allergen triggers. By keeping heavy fragrances out of the air and removing allergens that have settled onto surfaces, you can actually help improve indoor air quality.

Disinfectant wipes should NEVER be used to clean hands or other parts of the body.

Tools can really make a difference!

Using clean tools and a little elbow grease can go a long way to remove grime and germs. Your tools are important because they can make your job easier and more successful. Repeatedly using the same dirty rag only accumulates germs and transfers them between surfaces.

An example of a useful tool for general cleaning is microfiber. Microfiber is a reusable, absorbent fabric. Effective wet or dry, the tiny fibers scrub, trap and remove dust, dirt, and grime from a surface. Capable of absorbing up to eight times its weight in liquid, it is excellent for cleaning up spills. You can find microfiber versions of just about any sort of surface cleaning tool out there – including cloths and mops.

Whatever tool you choose to use, make sure it is clean, absorbent, and has texture!

Remember, there is a difference between antimicrobial pesticides and general purpose cleaners. Antimicrobial pesticides claim to kill germs on their labels, but general purpose cleaners do not.

Resources:

DPR School and Childcare IPM Program : http://apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/

U.S. EPA Safer Choice: https://www.epa.gov/saferchoice