

Green Cleaning Info: Planet-, People-Friendly

By Jennett Meriden Russell

Sarah and Craig Lee have been conscious of the environment for as long as they can remember. For years, the North Haven couple has done little things to keep Mother Earth healthy.

But the Lees, like most Americans, continued to clean the inside of their home with conventional cleaning products. That is until their son, Collier, was born.

The little boy came into the world with autism and a host of health problems associated with the disorder that made him extremely susceptible to the effects of harsh chemicals. It was after learning of their child's illnesses that the Lees decided it was time to go green.

"We try, very carefully, to not put what we think are toxins in his home environment," Mr. Lee said during a recent interview.

Green cleaning experts say that the chemicals in standard cleaning products contribute to indoor air pollution, are poisonous—even deadly—if ingested, and can be harmful if inhaled or touched.

Professional cleaner Cindy Capaldo, president of C's Home & Office Management of Sag Harbor, was introduced to green products by the Lees, who are among her clients. Ms. Capaldo, who owns her business with husband Chris Capaldo, said once she started using green cleaning products, she quickly dumped her conventional cleaning supplies altogether.

"I can't use them now, they make my throat burn and my eyes water," Ms. Capaldo said. "If you're using something that makes your throat burn and your eyes water, how good could that be for you?"

Michael Brylewski, president of Organic Cleaning, a green product service in Hampton Bays, noted that there

are many good green cleaning products on the market right now, several of them being made by traditional cleaning product manufacturers. He warned, however, that just because a product says it's natural doesn't mean it's non-toxic.

While ready-made green cleaning products are for sale, Mr. Brylewski said that many of the things needed to keep a house green clean and safe may already be in the home. Safe, simple ingredients such as plain soap, water, baking soda, vinegar, washing soda (sodium carbonate), lemon juice and borax can satisfy most household cleaning needs, and all come with cost savings measures, he said.

Mr. Brylewski said that many cleaning solution recipes from his grandmother's time are making a resurgence. He added that a quarter cup of vinegar in 32 ounces of water with two drops of Castile soap—a soap made with olive oil that originated from the Castile region of Spain—will take care of pretty much any mess a home can dish out.

"Put it in a spray bottle, and that will clean almost anything," said Mr. Brylewski. "The vinegar and water will also keep spiders from nesting in your windows."

He also warned that many consumers stubbornly keep using synthetic room fresheners and fragranced cleaning products which are making them sick. He noted that those products are also full of toxic chemicals, which he said can make indoor air unhealthy and provoke skin, eye, and respiratory reactions, as well as harm the natural environment.

Mr. Brylewski said that people with seasonal allergies could be making their conditions worse by using harsh cleaning products. He advises opening a window and letting those pollutants out.

"People sometimes say after we've cleaned a house, 'but it doesn't smell clean,'" Mr. Brylewski said. "Why? Because the smell isn't burning your eyes and throat? That's not clean, that's dangerous."