Colby College uses a variety of cleaning chemicals to get the job done. It’s important for every custodian to protect themselves and work safely with all the chemicals they use. Be aware of potential health hazards, even “green” products can be dangerous and may require taking precautions. The following Safety Talk address some of the hazards of cleaning chemicals and how to protect yourself.

Potential Health Hazards of Cleaning Chemicals:

• Skin irritants causing rashes, pain, and itching on contact
• Strong corrosives (floor strippers) can cause serious skin burns and eye damage with direct contact
• Mists, vapors and/or gases from cleaning chemicals can irritate the eyes, nose, throat and lungs when inhaled
• Chemicals in some cleaning products can cause asthma or trigger asthma attacks
• Mixing cleaning products that contain bleach and ammonia can cause severe lung damage or death

Potential Health Problems Caused by Cleaning Chemicals:
Many factors influence whether a cleaning chemical will cause health problems. Some important factors to consider include:

• Chemical ingredients of the cleaning product;
• How the cleaning product is being used or stored;
• Ventilation in the area where the cleaning product is used;
• Whether there are splashes and spills;
• Whether the cleaning product comes in contact with the skin; and
• Whether mists, vapors and/or gases are released.
General Guidelines to Protect Yourself:

- Use the least harmful chemical that can do the job at hand.
- Know the types and differences between various cleaning products
  - The three major types are: Cleaners, Sanitizers, and Disinfectants
- Know what you're using. Review the MSDS/SDS if you have any questions, or ask your supervisor or the EHS Director.
- Read the labels on all chemicals being used. Pay attention to safety precautions and follow the instructions for use. Never use chemicals contained in an unlabeled bottle.
- Measure all chemicals according to the instructions. If the instructions say to use 3 ounces of chemical in 1 gallon of water, measure each correctly. Too weak a solution may not provide the proper germ killing or cleaning power, and too strong a solution may damage the surface you're cleaning. Too strong a solution may also cause injury to yourself or others.
- Never substitute one chemical for another. Use each chemical for its designated use.
- Never mix chemicals together. This is a recipe for disaster.
- If the chemical calls for protection, use safety goggles and protective gloves.

BY THE NUMBERS:

- **64** buildings on Colby campus
- **1.5 Million** square feet of inside space at Colby
- **54** the number of custodians who keep this all clean
**Review / Discussion Questions:**

1. Can you explain the differences between cleaners, sanitizers and disinfectants?
2. Where could you get hazard information about the chemicals you are using?
3. What are the most hazardous chemicals you use? How do you protect yourself from the health hazards?

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*Questions, concerns or comments contact the EHS Director at extension 5504.*