

Caution; Don't Cuddle

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Word Count: 889

Snuggly, cuddly, soft and scented; commercialism and corporate marketing teams design such enticing advertisements. Newborns wrapped in soft linens, soft summer breezes and hugs galore; all if you use a piece of their colorful boxed fabric sheets in your dryer.

Could any harm come from softness, scents and cuddles?

Fabric softeners are some of the most toxic products made for daily household use. They contain mixtures of chemicals such as chloroform, benzyl acetate and pentane. These are known to cause cancer and damage to lungs, brain, and nervous system. Strangely enough, these chemicals are even more dangerous when used as directed; heated in clothes dryers.

The noxious fumes not only penetrate your clothes but are released into neighborhood air and everyone for blocks around are forced to breathe them in.

Fabric softener chemicals are made to stay in clothes fibers and slowly release for a very long time. That slow release of chemicals into the air affects the health of those wearing the clothes and of people around them; does not really make for a great hug when you could be poisoning the recipient.

Some symptoms caused by fabric softener fumes are tiredness that is not cured by resting, difficulty breathing, and nervousness for no known reason, difficulty concentrating and remembering, dizziness, headaches, sick stomach, feeling faint, rashes and/or difficulty controlling body movements.

Babies, children, the elderly, and people who are already sick or immune compromised are especially sensitive to the ingredients in dryer sheets. Damage can be permanent, causing lifelong illness. Babies often react with rashes, frequent crying or diarrhea. Disinfectants can have the same effects. Experts suggest a possible connection between Sudden Infant Death and the use of these products for washing baby clothes and crib sheets and blankets.

But what about fresh summer breezes and fruity or floral scents? Most fabric softeners also have synthetic fragrance added to them, which makes them even more toxic. Although they may make your clothes feel soft and smell of breezes and blossoms, fabric softener and dryer sheets are some of the most toxic consumer products.

And chances are those who use common commercial detergents, fabric softeners, bleaches, and stain removers would think twice if they knew they contained chemicals that could cause cancer and brain damage.

Here is a list of a few of the chemicals found in some fabric softeners and dryer sheets:

Benzyl acetate: Linked to pancreatic cancer

Formaldehyde: Linked to many illnesses

Benzyl Alcohol: Upper respiratory tract irritant

Ethanol: On the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Hazardous Waste list and can cause central nervous system disorders.

Limonene: Known carcinogen .

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A-Terpineol: Can cause respiratory problems, including fatal edema, and central nervous system damage.

Ethyl Acetate: A narcotic on the EPA's Hazardous Waste list.

Camphor: Causes central nervous system disorders.

Chloroform: Neurotoxic, anesthetic and carcinogenic.

Linalool: A narcotic that causes central nervous system disorders.

Pentane: A chemical known to be harmful if inhaled.

How could products with pretty names like Soft Ocean Mist, Summer Orchard and April Fresh be so dangerous?

The ingredients in fabric softeners are pungent and strong smelling; so strong that they require the use of additional synthetic heavy fragrances just to cover up the smells.

Furthermore, synthetic fabrics, which are the reason fabric softeners were created in the

first place, do not smell good either when heated in a dryer or heated by our bodies; hence the need for even more hefty fragrances.

In other words, remove all the added fragrance that endears people to fabric softeners and the real smell of the chemical-laced fabric softener may prompt people away from it.

As you wear clothing that has been coated and imbedded with fabric softener the chemicals are slowly released into the air for you to inhale and absorbed by your skin. Dryer sheets are particularly noxious because they are heated in the dryer and the chemicals are released through dryer vents and out into the environment. Health effects linked to fabric softeners include; central nervous system disorders, asthma, acne, eczema, headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, blood pressure reduction, irritation to skin, mucus membranes and respiratory tract, pancreatic cancer and sudden infant death.

There is no need to cuddle up with chemicals there are many simple solutions which will leave your laundry soft and your health intact. Even if you don't feel the effects of these chemicals today, they can affect you gradually over time, and children, whose systems are still developing, are particularly at risk. There's really no reason to expose yourself to these risky chemicals when natural alternatives exist. Not only are they safer for you, your family and the environment, but they're much more economical too.

By using a half a cup of baking soda in your wash cycle you will naturally freshen, soften and whiten your clothes. Adding a quarter of a cup of white vinegar to rinse to soften

fabric and eliminate static cling. Find your favorite pure essential oil a truly natural floral or citrus scent use 3 drops of pure organic essential oil to the rinse cycle for a soft natural scent. Reusable non-toxic dryer sheets will save you money and eliminate static safely and for a truly natural summer breeze scent there is nothing like hanging out a line of clothes; saving electricity and providing fresh crisp sun-kissed clothes perfect for a big hug.

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Since 1999, Judie has been aggressively researching a wide range of subjects, particularly those pertaining to human health and environmental issues. Judie has written for local, regional and national publications