



## HINTS FOR HOMEMAKERS



### Degrees Of Clean: Consumer Cleaning Products Defined

by Joan B. Rose, Ph.D.

(NAPSA)—There are many products available for ridding homes of dirt and germs. However, it is often difficult to decide which products are right for the job. All cleaning agents are not the same and improper use of these products could result in unsanitary conditions or illness.

Following is a list of the different categories of consumer products commonly found under the kitchen sink. Each product is composed of different compounds, and offers different degrees of cleanliness and safety to the household. These products are not heavily regulated.

- **Soaps**—Cleansing agents that remove dirt and grime. Generally, their purpose is to remove rather than to kill microorganisms.

- **Detergents**—Cleansing substances that act similarly to soap but are made from chemical compounds rather than fats and lye.

- **Cleansers**—A generic term describing detergents, powders or other chemical agents that remove dirt, grease or stains.

Antimicrobial agents are substances or solutions that destroy or suppress the growth of harmful bacteria, viruses or fungi on objects and surfaces. Classification of antimicrobials, based on their chemical properties, required testing and subsequent labeling, is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). Antimicrobial products are the most powerful cleaning products available. Examples are:

- **Disinfectants**—Chemical-based products, such as chlorine bleach, which destroy bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms. General disinfectants are used in numerous cleaning products, swimming pools and water purifiers.

- **Sanitizers**—Products that



**When it comes to cleaning, it's important to have the right product for the job.**

reduce the number of living microorganisms by significant numbers, but do not destroy or eliminate all of them.

- **Sterilizers**—Often called sporicides, these products destroy all forms of microbial life. Sterilization is performed in the hospital with pressurized steam, liquid or gaseous chemicals, or dry heat.

To minimize risk of illness and promote a clean household, read the labels of all cleaning products before use and decide which situations require which products. For more information, visit the following online resources:

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Infectious Diseases: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/op/cleaning.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/op/cleaning.htm).

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pesticide Programs: [www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizens/antimic.htm](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizens/antimic.htm).

Water Quality & Health Council, Food and Surfaces: [www.waterandhealth.org/food\\_surface/index.html](http://www.waterandhealth.org/food_surface/index.html).

• *Dr. Rose is chair of the Water Quality & Health Council and a microbiologist at the College of Marine Science, University of South Florida in St. Petersburg.*