Focus on: Dry cleaners and perchloroethylene (PERC)

**What is PERC?**
PERC, or perchloroethylene, is a common dry cleaning solvent.

**Why is PERC dangerous?**

**Health risks**
Contact with PERC can increase your risk of developing cancer and other health problems.

**Environmental risks**
PERC can get into the air, soil, and drinking water.

**Financial risks**
Sites contaminated with PERC can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to clean up.¹

**How can PERC solvent and waste affect you?**
- Air (breathing it in).
- Skin (touching PERC itself).
- Drinking PERC-contaminated water.
- Contact with PERC contaminated soils.

**New guidance for PERC starts this summer 2019**
All dry cleaners must manage wastes containing PERC or any other hazardous chemicals as dangerous wastes.

PERC drycleaners will no longer be allowed to mist, dispose of to the sewer, or evaporate separator water. Letters explaining these guidelines will be mailed to affected cleaners during the summer of 2019. Technical assistance visits to support best practices for waste handling will start in the fall of 2019.

**Handling PERC Waste**
Because used PERC and its wastes are listed dangerous waste, they must be managed safely.²
- Misting or evaporating separator water from PERC dry cleaners is not allowed.
- Separator water from PERC dry cleaners is dangerous waste.
- Separator water from PERC dry cleaners should not be disposed of to the sewer.

**Possible federal ruling**
The federal government is reviewing current PERC use. This could lead to nationwide restrictions or a ban by 2021.³

**What can I use instead of PERC?**
We recommend dry cleaners use:
1. Professional wet cleaning or
2. High-flashpoint hydrocarbon solvent.

² Listed wastes include wastes designated as F002 dangerous wastes such as spent PERC
Why should I stop using PERC?

Using PERC:

- Puts the health and safety of you and your workers at risk.
- Contaminates air, soil, and drinking water.
- Can increase your regulatory oversight due to a change in generator status.
- Can cost your business more in the long run.

Will I be compensated for switching to an alternative?

Some areas in Washington State offer financial incentives for businesses to switch from PERC to Professional Wet Cleaning.

Find out if your county offers financial incentives by contacting:

**King County:**
Hazardous Waste Management Program
Email: drycleanergrants@kingcounty.gov
Phone: 206-477-0660

**All other counties:**
Jeffrey Gutschmidt
Washington State Department of Ecology
Dry Cleaner Project Specialist
Email: jeffrey.gutschmidt@ecy.wa.gov
Phone: 425-649-7140

How will Ecology help me?

We plan to help PERC dry cleaners understand the new guidance and switch to an alternative if possible.

You can expect to receive:

- A letter from Ecology explaining the new guidance.
- A visit from Ecology to answer your questions and offer suggestions to help you reach compliance successfully.
- A reasonable timeline set by you and Ecology for you to reach compliance.

Professional wet cleaning is safest

Professional wet cleaning uses water and detergents to clean all fabrics, including “dry clean only” fabrics.

It is our preferred method because:

- It is the safest method.
- It is as effective as PERC for cleaning.  
- It eliminates hazardous waste.
- Dry cleaners can see lower operating costs.

High-flash hydrocarbon solvent

For dry cleaners who prefer a solvent-based system, we recommend switching to a high-flashpoint hydrocarbon solvent because, compared to PERC, it is:

- Better for human health.
- Better for the environment.

However, it is not our preferred method because:

- Even when operated correctly, hydrocarbon machines often produce dangerous wastes (i.e., still bottoms).
- These solvents are combustible and can be a fire hazard.

If your business chooses hydrocarbon, we recommend using the list from Toxics Use Reduction Institute's (TURI's) PERC Alternative Assessment Information, 6

More information

Website: www.ecology.wa.gov/drycleanerswaste

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Accommodation requests

To request materials in a format for the visually impaired, visit ecology.wa.gov/accessibility, call Ecology at 360-407-6700, Relay Service 711, or TTY 877-833-6341.

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4 Newer water-based machines surpass PERC in terms of quality and cost due to advances in computer technology and detergents (TURI Use of Toxics Institute, 2012).

5 A Seattle-based dry cleaner saved $385 on their first energy bill after switching to professional wet cleaning (Rule, 2018).

6 bitly.com/hcsolvent