
TOOLS FOR INFORMED SUBSTITUTION

HOW DO YOU FIND SAFER CHEMICALS FOR THE WORKPLACE?

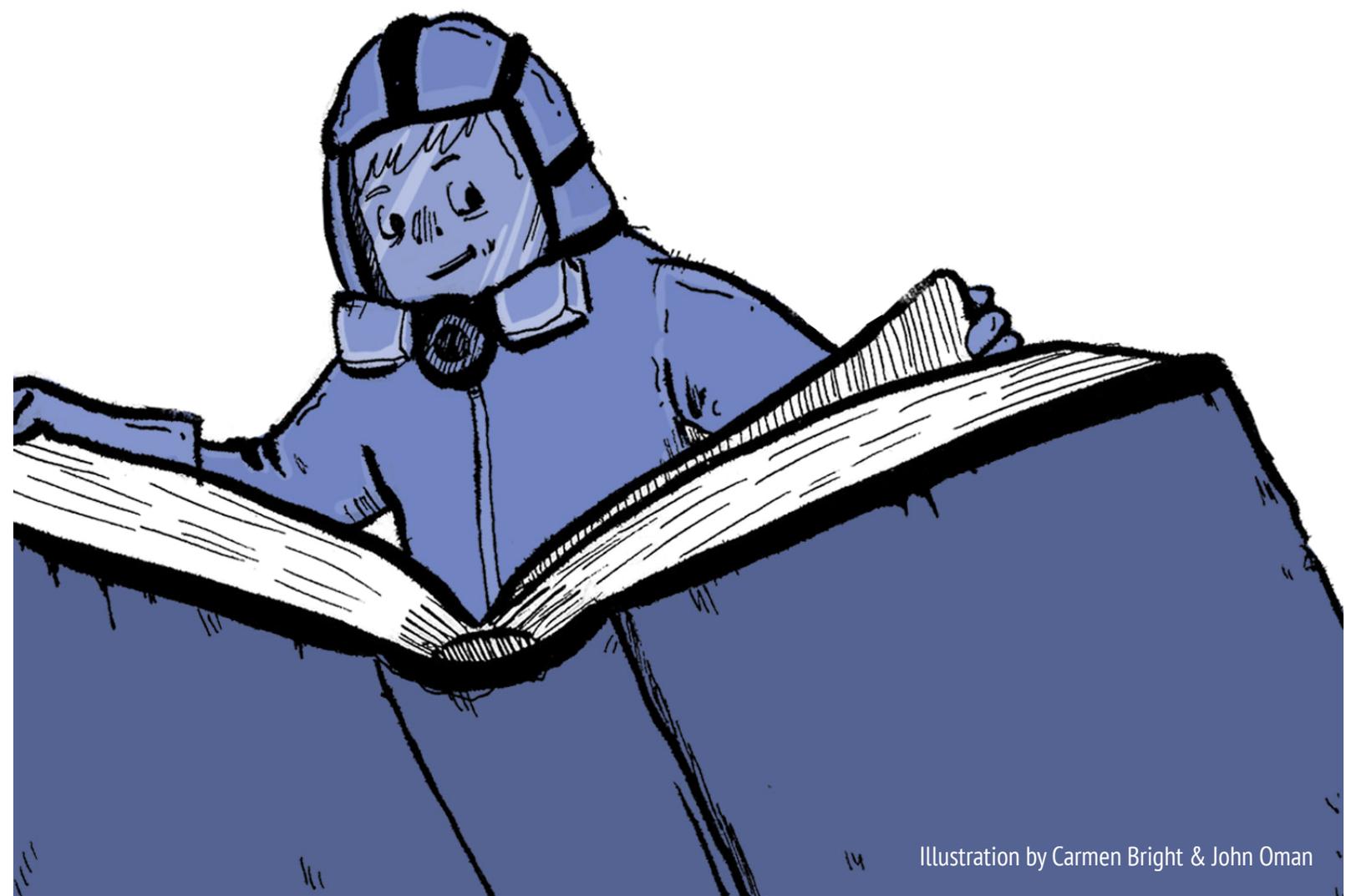


Illustration by Carmen Bright & John Oman

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Why this toolkit?

Cleaning products are common in our lives, at work and home. They're used to get rid of dirt on all kinds of surfaces, disinfect germs, wash our hands and clothes, clean our dishes, make the air smell better, and remove graffiti.

Whatever the purpose, the ingredients can include chemicals that cause harm when poured down the drain or used by or around people.

In workplaces, that possibility is leading to questions about what kinds of products workers are using, or what's used around them. Joint health and safety committees are searching for "green" solutions when workers report health effects they connect to cleaning products. Employers are adapting procurement practices to include environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) policies and products.

The *Tools for informed substitution* project focused on cleaning products used in British Columbia government

buildings. We identified toxic ingredients using on-line tools and recommended products that could or should be replaced with ones certified to less toxic or non-toxic by independent (third-party) organizations.

We also looked at the procurement policy that is supposed to guide buying cleaning products used in BC government buildings. And we used the principles of informed substitution to recommend alternative cleaning products that are consistent with that policy.

Funded by WorksafeBC's Innovation at Work programme, we did this work with the British Columbia Government and Service Employees Union (BCGEU) and the company that manages the province's buildings (WSI, now part of Brookfield Global Integrated Solutions) in 2014 and 2015. We built on earlier work funded by WorksafeBC, and the growing body of materials and studies about the hazards of cleaning products and how to prevent them.

We followed a series of steps that are explained in this toolkit. It includes the results of looking at the products. (There were some quite hazardous ingredients in a few products. Only about 25 percent had the independent certification expected in the government's procurement policy.)

The steps we took in this project can be replicated. Joint health and safety committees and procurement staff can take similar ones to identify informed substitutes for toxic cleaning products in other workplaces.

That's why we organized the toolkit into six sections. Each section provides information and processes to help you learn how to do this chemical detective work yourselves. There are resources at the end of each section, and more at the end of the toolkit. We've also used links within the toolkit so you can go back and forth as you wish.

If you're outside British Columbia, you may be inspired to check your own regulations and procurement policies for tools to get you to informed substitution of cleaning and other products.

For occupational health and safety reps, unions, procurement staff and managers, employer health and safety staff, and joint health and safety committees, the resources and databases are what you need for informed substitution of toxic cleaning products. The lessons can be used for other products too.

Read on!

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P.S. We also need to thank and credit the marvelous team of John Oman and Carmen Bright from unaluma.com. They did the cartoon graphics for this toolkit and designed the document itself. Please credit them if you borrow or use one of their creations.