



The Difference Between Sanitizers, Cleaners, Disinfectants, and Sterilants

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SANITIZERS

Sanitizers help reduce the amount of bacteria on surfaces usually by 99.9%. Sanitizers are also regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This means they go through a rigorous testing phase to ensure the product meets certain criteria, including being tested against specific germs. It won't get certified unless it passes. Most people don't know that a chemical product can't be labeled as a sanitizer unless it passes federal EPA certification. Sanitizers are only certified for bacteria.

You'll usually find sanitizers being used among food service providers. Any sanitizer with the label "food contact" sanitizer is safe for use to clean surfaces that come in contact with food. As with any chemical substance, the instructions must be followed and the surface completely dry before coming into contact with food products.

Sanitizers kill bacteria for certain amounts of time and must be reapplied when the surface becomes contaminated.





CLEANERS

While sanitizers reduce bacteria, cleaners are designed to remove soil, dirt and other impurities from surfaces. There are a number of products on the market designated as cleaners. Cleaners do not kill germs, they just work to remove them. Cleaners are not regulated under the EPA and they are not tested for effectiveness. Cleaners come in all types of strengths and the quality may vary. It's important to use the right type of cleaner for the type of dirt or soil you are removing.



DISINFECTANTS

To a certain extent, disinfectants are stronger than sanitizers because they work to kill a wider range of bacteria, mold and mildew, viruses and stronger types of bacteria.

Disinfectants are also regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and must also pass rigorous testing. A product may be a disinfectant and a sanitizer, which will then be labeled as a disinfectant-sanitizer.





STERILANTS

A sterilant is also a disinfectant usually found in healthcare settings. It is used to decontaminate areas that have viable microorganisms and pathogens. Sterilants help control infectious organisms due to their toxicity and must be handled very carefully. Sterilants are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and have rigorous standards.

When considering a sterilant against a disinfectant, consider this: sterilants can be used to kill all microorganisms while disinfectants kill only certain microorganisms. While sterilants are used to eliminate danger, some can be very harmful to humans and corrosive if not used and stored properly.



LABELING

By law, a product cannot be labeled as a disinfectant or sanitizer without certification, and there are strict labeling rules to follow. The following statement must be on every label under Directions of Use: "It is a violation of federal law to use this product in a manner inconsistent with its labeling." In addition, safety precautions and use directions must be outlined on the label of each registered product.

USING PRODUCTS SAFELY

When using these products, it's important to know what needs cleaned, disinfected and sanitized. When working with food it's important to clean, disinfect and sanitize. If a surface is touched on a consistent basis, cleaning and disinfecting routinely is key. This includes counters, doorknobs, phones, handles, faucets and especially bathrooms.

Paying close attention to hazard warnings and directions on product labels. As a rule of thumb, gloves should be used, as well as eye protection whenever possible. Washing surfaces with general household cleaners should remove germs. After rinsing with water, an EPA-registered disinfectant will kill any remaining germs.

Disinfectant wipes are sold with different concentrations. For certain items that are consistently touched, this is a good solution. Depending on the type of facility or amount of traffic coming into contact with the surface, it may be necessary to use more than one wipe at a time. Make sure the waste is handled properly to avoid contamination and a new accumulation of germs.



Do you have more questions about the differences in cleaners, disinfectants, sanitizers and sterilants to keep your environment safe and clean? Call our team today!

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