



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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GROUP LOOKING INTO ALTERNATIVE DRY CLEANING PROCESSES RELEASES REPORT

RALEIGH –North Carolina dry cleaners are reducing their usage of solvents such as perchloroethylene (PERC) and petroleum and are exploring alternative cleaning processes, according to a report released today by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The study, prepared at the direction of the General Assembly, recommends that state lawmakers promote the study of new processes within the industry.

DENR coordinated a study of the state's dry cleaning processes and evaluated potential alternatives to the current predominant methods. The agency completed the study with assistance from a work group consisting of representatives of nonprofit conservation organizations, the dry cleaning industry, dry cleaning process and equipment manufacturers, dry cleaning solvent manufacturers, and experts from the garment cleaning and dry cleaning industry. The group was charged with identifying current and developing alternative dry cleaning processes and equipment and their historical trends in use, evaluating the benefits and costs of these processes and equipment, and evaluating the feasibility of implementing and installing these processes and equipment.

The report's findings and recommendations to the General Assembly include:

- Use of perchloroethylene (PERC) in the dry cleaning industry has dropped dramatically (by at least 75 percent) during the past 15 years. Though the study group did not obtain industry-wide usage numbers, the use of solvents in the petroleum transfer process has been reduced by about 90 percent with installation of the new solvent recovery dryers and vacuum stills.
- Major improvements have recently been made in the detergents and machines used for wet cleaning, improving the potential to wet clean a much higher percentage of all clothes. Professional wet cleaning has always been used by professionals in conjunction with the solvent processes, and is also being used in conjunction with the new processes being developed.
- Lawmakers should encourage dry cleaning business owners to improve the efficiency of the PERC and petroleum processes, and to explore the effectiveness of new processes. The report recommends that additional reduction in PERC usage be encouraged rather than required by statute, because of the capital costs involved and since the state's dry cleaning industry is comprised of mostly small, family-owned businesses.
- The N.C. Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch and several other sources/reviewers concluded that there is no credible evidence to associate PERC as used in the dry cleaning industry with cancer in humans. PERC is the most widely used dry cleaning solvent in North Carolina, and is listed as a hazardous substance by the EPA.

In evaluating the alternative processes and equipment, the group considered the environmental and public health impacts of the processes and equipment; the ability of the processes and equipment to clean a wide variety of natural and synthetic fabrics without damage; the ability of small business organizations to finance, own and operate the processes and equipment; and the effect of widespread use of the processes and equipment on fire safety.

REPORTERS/EDITORS: The study group report can be found online at the [Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance Web site \(www.p2pays.org\)](#) under "Hot Topics." For more information on the report please contact [Bill Albright](#), environmental engineer, at (919) 715-6499/6500 or bill.albright@ncmail.net.

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