



Product Description

Laundry detergents are used for fabric cleaning purposes, and include products such as liquid detergents, gels, tablets, bars, granules, or solids that can be used for machine- or hand-washing applications.

Mission

The mission of The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) is to improve the sustainability of products when they are made, purchased, and used, with a focus on manufacturers and the retail buyers who decide what products to carry in stores. The information in this document is drawn from our detailed research on known and potential social and environmental impacts across product life cycles. TSC acknowledges that other issues exist, but we have included here those that are most relevant to the decision making of retail buying teams and manufacturers. The topics are listed alphabetically for ease of reading; the order does not represent prioritization or other criteria.

Sustainability Insights



Consumers

Consumer Health and Safety

Manufacturers should formulate products to contain ingredients in accordance with applicable safety standards and should perform any necessary assessments on ingredients and formulations. Manufacturers should list ingredients in accordance with regulatory requirements and communicate proper usage instructions to consumers in a clear and accessible fashion.

Product Efficiency

A significant part of the impact of laundry detergent comes from consumer use of water when using the product and the energy required for heating water for warm or hot water washing. In addition to ensuring robust cleaning performance, manufacturers should formulate detergents for use in high-efficiency washers, where available, and cold water conditions and improve the communication of instructions for proper water usage and choice of lowest relevant washing temperature during product application.



Managing the Supply Chain

Palm Oil

Many products contain palm oil, palm kernel oil, or ingredients that have been chemically derived from these oils. Palm oil production is one of the leading causes of deforestation, which is a significant contributor to climate change. The cultivation of palm oil also impacts climate, land, and water. Improper palm oil production and management may also lead to worker exploitation and threats to worker health and safety. Manufacturers should select suppliers that are working to improve sustainability and adopt standard guidelines from the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) or other certifications.



Use of Resources

Climate and Energy

Ingredient processing consumes significant amounts of electricity and energy, leading to greenhouse gas emissions. Manufacturers should procure from suppliers that help abate these impacts by measuring, tracking, and reporting energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, with a focus on reduction. They should also perform preventative maintenance on equipment, replace inefficient equipment, and encourage efficient energy behaviors throughout their operations.

Disposal and End-of-Life

Laundry detergent products should be formulated with end-use in mind because these products go down the drain and pass through wastewater treatment plants where biodegradation occurs. Manufacturers should obtain full chemical disclosure of raw materials from suppliers, perform assessments of ingredients, and replace non-biodegradable chemicals or biodegradable chemicals that break down into unacceptable compounds with better alternatives.

Water

Ingredient manufacturing for laundry detergent products can use a significant amount of water, which can contribute to freshwater depletion and may be problematic in water-stressed regions. Manufacturers should procure ingredients from suppliers who measure water use, and perform water use assessments throughout their supply chains, in order to map water risk in different geographical regions and mitigate impacts associated with freshwater depletion. Manufacturers should assure that water pollution is avoided throughout their supply chains, including where local government monitoring is lax.



Workers and Communities

Workers

Workers may be exposed to chemicals or other industrial hazards during production. To help ensure worker health and safety, manufacturers should procure ingredients from suppliers that transparently address worker health and safety and perform audits when needed.