

August 10, 2011

Letter to the Editor – Wall Street Journal

I write to clarify a number of points in your recent article “The New Dirt on Dry Cleaners” and to confirm that the manufacturers of perchloroethylene, or perc, remain fully committed to the safe and effective use of the solvent by the dry cleaning industry. Despite the many new options available for garment care, perc continues to provide superior cleaning performance and is still the choice of most dry cleaners.

Perc has been the standard for cleaning performance in dry cleaning operations for more than 70 years. A number of alternatives are available in the market, but when superior cleaning quality is necessary for fine, delicate or sensitive garments and fabrics, perc is the solvent of choice. Perc has a unique ability to rapidly penetrate fibers to dissolve soils, stains, fats and oils that have built up on the clothing without causing shrinkage or damage. That is the reason perc is used by approximately 70 percent of dry cleaners in the United States.

From the point of view of safety, considering both public health and the environment, it is important to note that perc is one of the most studied industrial chemicals. New dry cleaning equipment is designed to minimize emissions. The newest of these machines clean over 600 pounds of clothes using one gallon of perc, a more efficient rate of “solvent mileage” than alternative solvents. Many dry cleaners have installed vapor barriers to provide further safeguards. Additionally, dry cleaners have implemented training and safety education programs. The vast amount of data and experience that is available for perc does not exist for many of the alternative solvents, whose potential health and environmental effects are largely unknown.

The suppliers of perc are committed to serving the dry cleaning industry as long as there is a dry cleaning industry. They support U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state regulations that require the safe handling and disposal of perc; indeed for many years our association has published and distributed to dry cleaners a bulletin entitled “The Safe Handling of Perchloroethylene Dry Cleaning Solvent: Beyond Regulatory Compliance.” EPA’s mandate that perc dry cleaners not be co-located with residential buildings after 2020 does not apply to stand-alone facilities and California is the *only* state that has phased out perc dry cleaning across-the-board (by 2023), although some cities have adopted perc bans. We oppose such measures as unhelpful to the environment and unduly restrictive of consumer choice.

Thank you,

Faye Graul
Executive Director
Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance, Inc.