

## Question: What Is Green Dry Cleaning?

By VINNEE TONG

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-- Q. What is green dry cleaning and how can I find a cleaner near me that does it?

A. Dry cleaners looking for a chemical-free method have learned something from the domestic goddesses who run for the club soda to prevent a stain from setting. Simply put, carbonated water is related to what many are calling the most environmentally friendly way to get your clothes dry cleaned.

Dry cleaning involves washing clothes in liquids other than water. As it's done at 90 percent of cleaners in the U.S., it uses a liquid form of perchloroethylene (PERC), a chemical believed to cause cancer. As it evaporates, PERC can contaminate nearby air and groundwater, and reportedly can be absorbed through the skin from soil or from dry-cleaned clothes. California is phasing out its use by 2011.

A far less common technology, CO2 cleaning, uses liquid carbon dioxide to clean clothes instead of PERC. A handful of entrepreneurs have found a way to profitably operate dry cleaners using CO2, but the higher cost for the machines has prevented any wider adoption of it. (A CO2 machine costs about \$100,000, roughly twice as much as a PERC machine, which can cost \$45,000 to \$50,000.)

Supporters of CO2 cleaning see strong growth as soon as consumers are made more aware of its benefits.

"I think it really is ready to explode," said Howard Guy, President of Linde Cleaning U.S. LLC. The company has the rights to franchise and license the Hangers brand name, which is used by 15 of the roughly 45 CO2 cleaners operating in the U.S. today. Linde Cleaning is owned by the German conglomerate Linde AG, which also operates CO2 cleaners in Europe under the Fred Butler brand.

Josh Dorfman, author of "The Lazy Environmentalist" and host of his own radio show, said CO2 dry cleaning leaves clothes cleaner and without the smell that sometimes comes on chemically-cleaned clothes. The rising consumer demand for more environmentally friendly practices makes potential growth of CO2 cleaning a more viable near-term prospect, Dorfman said.

"People actually go out of their way once they realize there's an option," said David Kistner, co-founder of Green Apple Cleaners in New York. "We have grown tremendously in a very short period of time and it's all been organic and word of mouth."

Kistner started his business six years ago after reading about the potential health risks of PERC while his wife was pregnant with twins. The Lodi, N.J.-based business \_ which delivers clothes to doorman buildings and corporate clients in Manhattan \_ has a waiting list 500 long.

Independent green dry cleaners including those who license the Hangers name can be found in pockets around the country. Many are listed on the Web site <http://www.findco2.com/>.

Another method touted as more environmentally friendly than PERC is a silicone-based solvent called Green Earth. However, Green Earth also has come under scrutiny as a possible carcinogen, a claim that could harm its prospects among consumers concerned about their health.

Another common but less prevalent method, hydrocarbon, is the modern-day version of dry cleaning as it was discovered in the 1880's, when someone in France accidentally spilled turpentine on a stained tablecloth.

Hydrocarbon uses petroleum-based solvents and is sometimes marketed as being "organic." That segment holds about 7 percent of the U.S. dry cleaning market, Guy said.

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On the Net:

CO2 dry cleaners in the U.S.: <http://www.findco2.com/>

Green Earth cleaners: <http://www.greenearthcleaning.com/consumer/rostersearch.asp>

The Lazy Environmentalist: <http://www.lazyenvironmentalist.com/>