Dry Cleaner Safety Stats and Facts

FACTS

1. Studies in laboratory animals show that exposure to high amounts of PERC can affect a developing fetus. Birth defects, altered growth, and even miscarriage may ensue. Studies on humans are limited and inconclusive.
2. Dry cleaners extensively use cleaning chemical agents that may cause various health problems. Some of these chemicals present a fire hazard.
3. Dry cleaners may get injured or burned by cleaning machines, irons, conveyors, and other equipment in their workplaces.
4. The dry cleaners' workplaces are usually hot, humid, and noisy, which may cause excessive fatigue and ill feeling.
5. Dry cleaners may need to handle heavy and bulky loads, do continuous repetitive movements and work in uncomfortable postures. This may cause trauma and, in the course of time, back, arm and hand pain.
6. Workers at dry-cleaners often breathe fumes from dry-cleaning fluids (also known as solvents). Workers also are exposed to solvents through their skin.
7. Most dry-cleaning machines now use perc (perchloroethylene, PCE). Some machines also use other solvents, usually Stoddard solvent.

STATS

- It is estimated that several million people are employed in dry cleaning worldwide.
- The relative risks for mortality from urinary bladder cancer were elevated in both United States cohorts (relative risks of 1.7 and 2.5, total of 17 deaths).
- The relative risk for mortality from cervical cancer was increased by 70-80% in the two United States cohort studies

but not at all among dry cleaning and laundry workers.

- An estimated 500,000 workers in 50,000 industrial plants in the United States are exposed to PCE; over half the 300 million kilograms of PCE used annually are used in an estimated 25,000 dry-cleaning establishments.
- The commercial drycleaning industry in the United States consists of approximately 36,000 shops. Most of these shops are small businesses with fewer than 10 employees. Approximately 85% of drycleaning shops in the U.S. use perchloroethylene as their primary solvent.