

# Phosphate choice: 'bright' clothes or clean water

I have become aware of our problems with phosphates and our clean water. Yet I am still baffled by so much technical information. Could you "clean" this up for me?

—M. Morgan, Detroit

Information on this problem can be confusing and unless you are a chemist or the like, looking up technical words won't be much help. What has happened is this: With the aid of Madison Ave. and television ads we have been led to believe everything has to be brighter than bright and cleaner than clean. Unfortunately, unless you like to walk around all the time wearing sunglasses, the clothes you wear really don't have to be that bright—besides most people couldn't tell the difference.

Now for some clarification: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is looking again at the question of whether phosphates should be banned from laundry detergents used in the Great Lakes basin.

In recent decades a condition that leads to premature aging of fresh water lakes (which is on the increase) is known as "accelerated eutrophication," the chief cause of which is phosphorus.

What does all this mean? Simply put, the most obvious evidence of eutrophication is algae, especially when it piles up on the beaches and forms mats in the water near shore in late

summer. It then interferes with swimming and even our drinking water and food supplies.

A ban on phosphates has been in effect in Indiana for several years. A preliminary study of lakes and streams indicates that there are some encouraging results due, in large part, to this ban. During the past two summers, there were no fish kills related to excessive growth of algae. The appearance, taste and odor of the water have also improved.

Many phosphate detergents remain on the shelves. Most are caustic and must be kept secure from small children. Most manufacturers now limit

the amount of phosphate in these products to 8.7 per cent or less—which is still rather high. Purchase no phosphate products when you have the choice. Soap and washing soda are also effective.

Legislation has been introduced in Michigan to ban phosphates. Michigan waters can only suffer from the continued use of phosphate detergents. The time has come to decide on priorities—sparkling clean clothes or sparkling clean water. It's up to us.

I'm really confused by an article in the Consumer Mailbag Jan. 27, suggesting that we would be wise to reduce

our consumption of fish due to the findings of a recent study by the U.S. Federal Drug Administration.

I am on a diet program that strongly advises that I eat a great deal of fish every week, and frankly, I would now hesitate to follow these instructions. My doctor also agrees that it would be wise not to eat too much of any one food, so I'm really concerned about what to do.

Just how much fish would it be advisable for me and my family to eat without risking an increase of PCB in our systems?

—Joan R., Birmingham



Consult with your diet program's nutritionist to investigate the program's policy on fish consumption and PCB levels. The Department of Natural Resources has a helpful publication, "Fish Eating Advisory," and you can get a copy by writing the local office, 2455 N. Williams Lake Road, Pontiac


48054. For more specific information, call 666-1555 and ask to speak to a fisheries biologist.

For further hints on ecological homemaking, send 10 cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Concern, Inc., Detroit, 1 Northfield Plaza, Troy 48068.



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## The facts about the Chatham Consumer Food Council of Metro Detroit

- Q. Why did Chatham start the Consumer Food Council?**
- A.** The Consumer Food Council was formed in December, 1976 and announced publicly January 19, 1977. Its purpose is to show how Chatham is rated with a group of food shoppers just like you on subjects of the greatest interest to you — such as food prices, quality and store services. And then to publish the testimonials and survey results of the Council in advertising.
- Q. Is the Consumer Food Council a government group?**
- A.** No. It has no affiliation with any branch of government. It is solely a Chatham project.
- Q. Are Council members all Chatham shoppers?**
- A.** No. In fact, ten of the original twelve members are regular shoppers at competitive chain stores. The composition of future Councils will continue to include shoppers from each of the five major chains.
- Q. Were CFC members "hand-picked"?**
- A.** No. Originally, candidates for membership were chosen by random selection from the telephone books by an independent research firm, Research One. Members were screened for county residence, family size, store regularly shopped, availability to serve and no family affiliation with the advertising, research or food industries. Future Councils will be drawn from lists of people who have written requesting membership and will be similarly screened.
- Q. How can the CFC be objective when it is sponsored by Chatham?**
- A.** Council members are instructed to make their opinions as objective as possible. Research One is responsible for the objectivity of any research undertaken and for auditing results. And Council membership will change periodically to help assure non-bias.
- Q. Will other supermarkets be mentioned by name in future CFC reports?**
- A.** Yes. The winner of any survey will be named even if it's not Chatham.
- Q. How are CFC members compensated?**
- A.** During the first assignments and before the members were told that Chatham was the sponsor, Research One paid each member \$10.00 per hour, plus mileage when on assignment, (but no pay for travel time). Now, to avoid bias because Chatham has identified itself as the Council's sponsor, members are reimbursed for their expenses only — such as baby sitting and mileage. Also the required union scale payments are made to Council members appearing in radio and television commercials.
- Q. Who benefits from the activities of the Consumer Food Council?**
- A.** Food shoppers benefit because the CFC will sharpen competition among supermarkets and keep us all on our toes. Chatham has confidence in its personnel and stores and is willing to be measured against competition. If we consistently rate high, we hope you'll be persuaded to shop at Chatham.



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