

19 March, 2020

## **RQ Health & Safety: Working from home**

The current global pandemic is having a real and tangible impact on businesses across the state including Racing Queensland and its clubs.

With the environment rapidly changing, employees may be required to work from home on a sporadic or ongoing basis.

Accordingly, extra vigilance will be required in order to keep your working from home environments disinfected and clean.

It is therefore prudent to remind ourselves of the hazards we may be exposed to when using everyday household cleaning chemicals and the dangers of using them outside of recommended guidelines.

It is recommended you only use chemicals as per the instructions on the bottle / packet and use appropriate Person Protective Equipment recommended by the manufacturer.

The following information summarises the dangers of mixing common household chemicals and highlights that in order to protect your health and safety mixing should never occur.

Mixing chemicals can create explosions and noxious gases, both of which could cause injuries or death.

Bleach is a very common cleaning fluid, and chemically speaking, is a solution of sodium or calcium hypochlorite.

When mixed with any acid, it releases highly toxic chlorine gas.

Most toilet bowl cleaners contain sodium hydrogen sulphate an acid which will quickly liberate chlorine from bleach.

The acrid fumes of chlorine can cause serious lung damage and even death.

Therefore, homeowners should know which cleaning supplies and other chemicals to avoid mixing; the following is a list of household chemicals that you should never mix.

- Bleach and toilet cleaners = Toxic chlorine gas;
- Bleach and vinegar = Toxic chlorine gas;
- Bleach and ammonia = Toxic chloramine vapor;
- Mixing acids with bases create a violent reaction which can cause chemical burns; and
- Mixing different brands of the same type of product can produce reactions including explosions.

## **Harmful chemicals**

Mixing household chemicals can definitely be dangerous, however, dangers exist in many household chemicals even without mixing.

The following chemicals are broken down by their dangers:

- Bleach - Even without mixing with other chemicals, bleach can be a dangerous substance. Bleach is a caustic substance: It can cause skin, eye and respiratory irritations, especially if used in an unventilated area. Make sure bleach is diluted and used in a ventilated area. Also, respirators/masks, eye goggles, and gloves may be necessary when cleaning with bleach;
- Toilet bowl cleaners - These cleaning products can cause skin and eye irritation, kidney and liver damage, and respiratory problems. When working in an unventilated bathroom, use a mask, and during ventilated use, eye goggles and gloves are recommended;
- Ammonia - Dangerous to eyes, skin, and respiratory tract, so make sure goggles, gloves, and masks are worn in unventilated areas; and
- Furniture polish - May contain nitrobenzene, a highly toxic chemical that can be absorbed through the skin, so always wear gloves when working with polishes.

Many dangers may lurk in innocent household chemicals.

However, a little chemical knowledge can assist you in using chemical cleaners properly.

Also, products will be labelled with proper cleaning procedures and warnings, so ensuring that you follow the chemical directives will also keep you safe & healthy.

When in doubt, wear gloves, goggles and a mask, and never mix cleaning products.