

Laundry's Dirty Little Secret

Making Sure Your Detergent is Truly Plastic-Free



Laundry and dishwashing detergent currently come in various types: powder, liquid, sheets, tablets, and pods. Newer companies may tout earth-friendly and plastic-free benefits. And the package might say, “easily dissolves” or “packaging is recyclable.” But, if the actual product contains the ingredient: polyvinyl alcohol, then warning bells should be going off.

Polyvinyl alcohol (or PVA or PVOH) is a plastic polymer used in laundry and dishwashing pods and sheets. This plastic covering holds the detergent in a golf ball-sized pod, or a sheet that fits in the palm of your hand. They seem innocent enough, but buyer beware!

The trouble is that PVA isn't 100% biodegradable. Like stirring salt in a glass of water, laundry and dishwashing pods and sheets dissolve in water but don't completely disappear. The plastic film becomes microplastics—bits too small to see or even to be filtered from water treatment facilities. A recent study suggests that over 75% of PVA persists in our waterways and soil, and a complete understanding of the consequences of this are lacking.

Non-Plastic Detergent Options

The following detergents have no plastic in the product or the packaging. And bonus, the packaging is usually cardboard, which is highly recyclable.

Tablet: Shaped a little like a pod, but isn't encased in any sort of plastic film. (Examples: Blueland, Renuv)

Powder: Around long before anyone ever thought of putting laundry detergent in a plastic bottle. Turns out, this tried-and-true option was on the right track all along. (Examples: 7th Generation, Meliora, Tide, Cheer)

Watch Out For:

Pods—Examples: Tide, Cheer, Gain, 7th Generation, Dropps, All, Pure

Sheets—Examples: Ecos, Grove, Laundry Club, Earth Breeze, Tru Earth

Liquids—Does not contain PVA, but the plastic bottle the liquids come in is a single-use plastic, which should be avoided.

Note: The examples listed are not intended as a complete catalog of brands but are provided to be used as examples. Always check with the manufacturer, as products are continually updated.

**Remember—plastic breaks up,
not down!**