

Bubbles - We Don't Need No Stinking Bubbles

How many times have you seen someone walk up and push a lit elevator button? Don't we all know that doesn't get the elevator there any faster? Yet, there are millions of us that just cannot resist the temptation to re-push that button because we secretly believe that it will. This is also true of our Pavlovian attachment to the belief that bubbles are an indicator of efficacy in soaps and detergents. I know, I know; this is soap heresy. Still, consider your dishwasher detergent. If you have ever attempted to use it to wash dishes in the sink; your lust for bubbles went unsatisfied. Yet, dishwasher cleaned dishes represent the pinnacle of hygiene. How do we reconcile the obvious conflict between the fact of clean versus the perception of clean? As a rule, we don't and as a result, we let the whiz kids in marketing lead us around by the bubbles. In the meantime, we bubble our way into wasting water, polluting the environment, irritating our skin and not necessarily coming out clean. Consider for a moment what happens when you're cleaning the tub after a shower or bath. Think about the amount of time you run the water after the dirt and water are gone to get the bubbles down the drain. Surely there are babies, thirsty in a desert somewhere in the world that could live for weeks on the water consumed by bubble rinsing alone. In the 1960's we decided phosphates were a bad thing because we noticed that streams and rivers were bubbling up all over the world behind processed wastewater dumping. The kids over in research and development jumped right on the impending bubble crisis and devised different bubbling agents. Although the rivers aren't bubbling anymore, it is important to remember that one company's "environmentally friendly agent" can be another local resident's "eco-terrorist". Can't you see it now? The oversized cast iron bathtub over-overflowing with creamy bubbles. It's the poster child for luxury, relaxation and romance. One very popular method of creating a stronger film, the reason for profuse and durable bubbles, is coconut oil. 100% coconut oil soap is the only soap that will bubble up in salt water. Wow! That is amazing bubble power but in concentrations as low as 30% coconut oil is drying to the skin. Sometimes, manufacturers correct for the drying by adding more ingredients. Sometimes, they leave you to fend for yourself. More importantly, the labeling isn't going to give you a clue what they did. Remember a few lines back when I said that stronger film makes stronger bubbles? Have you ever showered or bathed and started to towel off only to discover that you are covered in a ... (What's the word I'm looking for?) ... Oh yeah, "film". So much for clean. In short, (I know it's a little late for that) I'm not saying we have to turn our collective backs on the bubbles. We just need to understand the difference between clean, the perception of clean and the respective costs of each.

About the Author

Glacier descent, warning me of the crevasses hidden among the blankets of snow and boulders of ice that give the famed ski run its breathtaking.

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