LAUNDRY AGENTS

The primary way of caring for clothes is laundering. It involves the washing and straightening of fabrics.

Laundry agents are the substances which aid the removal of dirt from fabric articles. They are water, detergents and soaps, bleaches, stiffening agents, and stain removers.

Water

Water is a very important cleansing agent in laundry. It is used for soaking clothes and household articles before washing. It cleanses articles with non-greasy dirt to a certain extent. For instance, sugar dissolves in water. Hot water melts and softens grease. It is used for rinsing clothes and to dampen them before ironing.

Detergent and Soaps

A detergent is any substance that cleanses or aids the removal of dirt. Soaps and synthetic detergents are all detergents. Soap is made by the reaction between fats/oil of animal vegetable origin and alkalis. The commonest alkali used is caustic soda.

Synthetic detergents are made from mineral oil or petroleum products. Common detergents in the Nigerian market are Omo, Ariel, Good Mama, etc. While synthetic detergents are suitable for heavily soiled articles, soaps are used for washing delicate articles.

Soap and detergents are used to lower the surface tension of water. They enable the water to wet the dirty articles/fabrics. They break up grease-held dirt in the fabric into tiny particles. They remove dirt from the fabric.

Bleaches

Bleaches are used to make white cotton and linen fabrics whiter. It could also be used to remove certain stains, and to kill disease carrying germs in fabrics.

Bleaches should be used only on fabrics that cannot be damaged by it, such as white cotton and linen. Bleach solution should be made according to manufacturer's instruction or recommendation on the bottle. White cotton and linen fabrics should be soaked in the solution for not less than 10 minutes. Always treat articles with a number of weak concentration of bleach rather than one very strong concentration of bleach. Never use undiluted bleach or bleach neat on any fabric as it could damage the fabric.

Stiffening Agents

These include different types of laundry starches: hot water starch, cold water starch, spray or aerosol starch, gum Arabic, glue, etc. Stiffening agents are used to stiffen cotton and linen fabrics; to give the fabric a smooth surface; to give the fabric a fresh look; to make fabrics keep clean for longer period, as a starched article is smooth surfaced and dirt cannot adhere easily to the smooth surface.

Stain Removers

A stain is a spot or a mark made on a fabric which gives a colour that is different from the rest of the surface of the fabric. There are different types of stains, e.g. vegetable, animal, and grease stains. Each type of stain requires a specific remover, as follows:

Stain Removers	Stains
Methylated Spirit	Greasy stain lipstick
Lemon juice	Iron mould (rust), ink
Bleach	Mildew
Kerosene	Palm oil, tar
Turpentine	Shoe polish
Ammonia	Perspiration
Glycerine	Chocolate, coffee, tea
Enzyme detergent	Blood

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