

Many consumers across the state have noticed their automatic dishwasher isn't getting dishes as clean as it used to. Some are also finding a film on glassware. The water hasn't changed, and the dishwasher is probably working as is always has. The cause can likely be attributed to a new formulation of dishwasher detergent that no longer includes phosphates.

Ohio law has limited the amount of phosphates in laundry detergent to 0.5 percent since 1990. [That law](#) has been expanded to include dishwasher detergent. Fifteen other states, and some local jurisdictions, have similar laws with other states considering it.

Phosphorus, from many sources, is a key nutrient for algae growth in bodies of water. [Harmful algal blooms](#) have become a major problem in several Ohio lakes, along with Lake Erie. Removing phosphates, a form of phosphorus, from detergent is one of many efforts the state is making to improve the quality of water running off into lakes.

Phosphates were used in dishwasher detergent to help remove food and grease, reduce spotting and filming, control water hardness and suspend bits of food so they were not redistributed on dishes. To improve dish cleaning with non-phosphate detergent, the American Cleaning Institute, a trade group of cleaning product manufacturers, instructs consumers to pay close attention to how the dishwasher manufacturer recommends dishes be loaded. Heating the water above 120 degrees and using a rinse agent can also help improve performance, the institute reports. The film on glassware can be removed using vinegar. Further details are on the [American Cleaning Institute website](#).