

Green Cleaning

What is Green Cleaning?

Green cleaning refers to using cleaning products and procedures that minimize potential negative impacts to human health and the environment.¹ Comprehensive green cleaning programs prioritize environmental and health issues as well as the appearance of the facility. The commercial cleaning industry uses an estimated 8 billion pounds of chemicals and nearly 4.5 billion pounds of paper products annually and a shift to greener cleaning has the potential for a major impact on the environment.² Environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) refers to products or services that have less impact on human health and the environment than competing products or services that serve the same purpose.³



Figure 1 – Spray bottles (Source: Flickr fatedsnowfox http://www.flickr.com/photos/fatedsnowfox/4540384687/sizes/l/in/photo_stream/)

Many cleaning products can cause immediate hazards to human health such as burns or respiratory or eye problems on contact, while others may contribute to long-term health problems such as cancer or disruption to the endocrine system. Corrosives, which are found in many bathroom, toilet and drain cleaners, often contain chlorine bleach or ammonia. These chemicals can cause immediate problems upon exposure as well as damage to the environment when they go down the drain. Six of every 100 janitorial workers injured on the job each year are hurt by the cleaning chemicals they use. Burns to the eyes and skin are the most common injuries, followed closely by the inhalation toxic fumes.⁴

Green cleaning is not just about products but also about cleaning procedures such as using the right quantity of the right product for a specific job or reducing frequency of labor-intensive tasks by using less intensive cleaning and maintenance activities more often. Green cleaning requires a holistic approach that includes the careful selection and use of products and equipment, a reevaluation of cleaning procedures, comprehensive custodial training, and orientation to green cleaning policies and procedures for all

¹ NJ Environmentally Preferable Purchasing. <http://www.nj.gov/dep/opppc/njeppp6-08.pdf> (accessed April 6, 2010).

² Facilities.net. Launching a Green Cleaning Program. <http://www.facilitiesnet.com/iaq/article/Launching-a-Green-Cleaning-Program--8382> (accessed April 7, 2010).

³ Presidential Executive Order 13101; definition also used by US EPA (http://www.healthyschools.org/documents/green_cleaning_guide.pdf) (accessed April 6, 2010).

⁴ Western Sustainability and Pollution Prevention Network. Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project. <http://www.westp2net.org/Janitorial/jp4.cfm> (accessed April 6, 2010).

building occupants. Simple changes such as limiting food consumption to specific areas can be part of an integrated pest management plan and reduce the need for toxic pest management chemicals in the building.

How to Implement Green Cleaning

Choose products that are rated green by independent, third party organizations such as US EPA's Design for Environment, Green Seal, or Environmental Choice Certification. Custodial equipment, such as vacuums, and green cleaning services can also earn third party certification through programs like Green Label of the Carpet and Rug Institute and Green Clean Institute Certification. It is also important to check product labels and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). As part of a building's Operations & Maintenance plan, develop a green cleaning program. This will require the purchasing of environmentally preferred products as well as training of staff in green cleaning practices.

Benefits

The following benefits can be achieved by utilizing green cleaning products and practices:

- Protects health and safety of building occupants and cleaning professionals
- Reduces toxic chemicals in the indoor and outdoor environment and reduces amount of hazardous waste requiring disposal
- Promotes better inventory management of chemicals and equipment
- Reduces liability through safety training

Costs

Facility executives have found that green cleaning does not increase cleaning costs. Over the long-term, green cleaning frequently reduces the total cost of cleaning. Because there are fewer toxic chemicals that employees must work with, liability exposure also is reduced. Similarly, with fewer toxic chemicals to store, track, maintain and dispose of, the cost of complying with regulatory requirements is reduced.⁵ There are many green cleaning products that are cost-competitive with traditional products and green cleaning programs offer added benefit of protecting human health and the environment. In addition, when combined with Day Cleaning, Green cleaning can reduce a building's

⁵ Facilities.net. "Launching a Green Cleaning Program." <http://www.facilitiesnet.com/iaq/article/Launching-a-Green-Cleaning-Program--8382> (accessed April 7, 2010).

energy usage by not requiring additional energy usage during off hours (see [Day Cleaning](#) strategy).

Resources

US EPA Design for Environment

<http://www.epa.gov/dfc/index.htm>

NJ Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

<http://www.nj.gov/dep/opppc/njeppp6-08.pdf>

New York's Green Cleaning Program

<https://greencleaning.ny.gov/entry.asp>

Green Seal

<http://www.greenseal.org/index.cfm>

Environmental Choice Certification

<http://www.environmentalchoice.com/en/index.asp>

Green Cleaning Network

<http://www.greencleaningnetwork.org/index.html>