



SCHOOL BUSINESS AFFAIRS

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Truths and Myths about Going Green

Seven factors to consider before putting together an industrial cleaning supplies list for effective school building cleaning.

By Susan Scapparone

Concerned about the types of cleaning products they use, K–12 school district procurement directors and facility managers may favor green cleaning, yet be hesitant about the cost, believing it “takes green to go green.”

They aren’t alone; consumers are skeptical as well. According to “The Sustainable Consumer,” an April 2021 report by the market research firm Mintel, just over half the population is confused by sustainability claims, unsure of the effectiveness of their sustainable actions, and looking for brands with simple, convenient, and cost-effective options.

Green cleaning is about far more than switching out a few chemical cleaning products.

Procurement directors and facility managers choose products on the basis of various factors beyond cost, such as function, safety, quality, aesthetics, and, increasingly, environmental and social attributes. In response to emerging regulations and market demand for safer and more sustainable products, increasing numbers of manufacturers offer products that address these factors.



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But green cleaning is about far more than switching out a few chemical cleaning products. It’s about systems working together and integrating chemicals, tools, procedures, and equipment while providing staff training, documentation, and record keeping to ensure healthier buildings and, in turn, healthier occupants.

With that in mind, here are seven factors to consider before putting together an industrial cleaning supplies list for effective school building cleaning.

1. Give green a chance.

Facility managers often oppose purchasing green cleaning products because they believe environmental best practices are costly. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Green product prices have dropped and are now comparable to or below those of traditional cleaning products.

Moreover, those products can save the district money while improving a building’s environmental profile.

Chemical advances and the desire of manufacturers to rid the industry of harmful chemicals have led to this cost drop. In addition, green cleaning products are often sold in a higher chemical concentration, decreasing the amount of product needed. Therefore, final costs can be dramatically lower than traditional products.

2. Help is on the way.

Some school district leaders and their boards believe that promoting sustainability is complex and difficult. Many third-party organizations and certification programs can help districts follow green guidelines.

Consult with local U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) chapters for more information on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). Learn more about Green Seal to understand how cleaning products and procedures are certified green.

Educate district leaders about programs such as ISSA's Clean Industry Management Standard for ways to institute green facility maintenance and cleaning practices. These organizations offer certification programs that outline various categories and best practices and guides on certified products to help facility managers accelerate their sustainable efforts.

It's never been easier to follow green guidelines. Additionally, look for products marked ECOCERT, EPA Safer Choice, Design for the Environment, or Green-E certified. These certifications indicate that the product is better for the environment.

Remember that USGBC and LEED certificates do not certify cleaning products. LEED facility certification has a prerequisite for a green cleaning program; however, there isn't a "list" of certified products.

Consult with a third-party vendor for the certifications that may apply to a specific product. Additionally, the Carpet and Rug Institute has a rating program for the effectiveness of carpet cleaning equipment. These recommendations can help districts select the best equipment for a green cleaning program.

3. Live life cleaner.

A common myth is that green cleaning products are not as effective as their conventional cleaning counterparts. Just because a chemical cleaner is made in a more sustainable way doesn't mean it won't deliver on cleaning performance.

Green products, in most cases, are just as effective as traditional cleaners that use harsh chemicals. However, since sustainable products don't always include fast-acting chemicals, green products may need to dwell a bit longer to have an effective cleaning result. Each product is different, so always read the label. Many school

MAKING DISTINCTIONS

Consumers often confuse the terms "eco-friendly" and "sustainable." Eco-friendly is something that does not harm the environment. Something that is sustainable can be maintained without depleting natural resources.

When it comes to eco-friendly industrial cleaners, a company's claims and how consumers interpret those claims can be very different. To address that possible miscommunication, the Federal Trade Commission issues Green Guides to help marketers avoid making environmental claims that mislead consumers.

For example, the guides suggest that for a product to be labeled eco-friendly, the manufacturer must explain *on the packaging* why the product is environmentally responsible.

facility managers and their custodial staff believe green cleaning is worth the extra time to reduce exposure to toxic chemicals among faculty and students.

Look for green products with the EcoLogo or Green Seal certifications. These products have undergone rigorous testing for both chemistry and performance.

4. Green affects productivity.

Scientific evidence has made it clear that certain cleaning products can affect health and wellness at K–12 schools. Students in schools committed to sustainability often outperform those in schools that don't consider the impact on their operation.

In any given building, 90% of exposure to pollutants occurs indoors. Conventional cleaners—such as aerosol sprays, bleach, some detergents, and carpet or floor cleaners—can be dangerous for the custodial staff and other employees when inhaled. When they are used, these products release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air and increase the likelihood that faculty members or students will experience eye, skin, and respiratory inflammation.

Certified green commercial cleaning products and services eliminate harmful VOCs, allowing everyone in the building to breathe easier. Green products have also been known to increase worker productivity and reduce the number of employee or customer complaints. So consider indoor air quality when making facility maintenance decisions.

An easy way to have cleaner buildings, improve indoor air quality, and save significant dollars is to install quality, effective, bi-level entrance matting to stop tracked-in soils at the door and off your floors.

5. Comparison shopping.

In many cases, green products and equipment don't cost more than conventional products. Some nontoxic products are less expensive than standard cleaning products. Facility managers can see cost savings in the form of cleaning efficiencies and reduced chemical usage. High-efficiency green cleaning programs can reduce cleaning costs by lowering the frequency of cleanings.

6. A clean environment is a safe environment.

True green products are safer and leave a smaller carbon footprint. Check labels carefully, however. Using a marketing trend called "greenwashing," some companies spend more time and money on marketing themselves as *environmentally friendly* than on minimizing their environmental impact.

7. Show your worth, save the earth.

One of the advantages of using green products is they don't pollute the environment. Green cleaning decreases pollution and resource depletion and slows global climate change. Since they are often derived from renewable, biodegradable resources, green products don't hurt the planet's ecosystem to the extent that many traditional cleaning products do.

A Win-Win for All

Science has made it clear that cleaning products can affect the safety, health, and cleanliness of a school building. Although it can be difficult to pinpoint exact cost savings, there is no question that today's savvy school districts and procurement officers understand the benefits of green cleaners, from increasing the longevity of their school's floors, walls, and office equipment to providing intangible health and environmental benefits.

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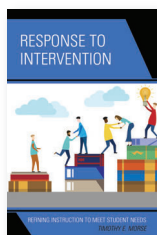
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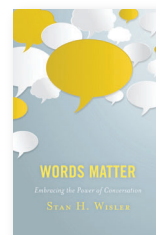
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