

## Green Cleaning: What It Means to Facility Managers

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### GROWING TREND

Green is also in fashion. It's not only hip, it's the current business imperative of the decade. Campuses are going Green for many reasons - public image, student choice and competitive advantage. A university's environmental capabilities are a strategic criterion for success. Campus administrators are examining new strategies for meeting the challenging objectives of keeping energy costs down and maintaining healthier building environments. Simultaneously, new programs are emerging that offer helpful information and support. For example, the Healthy Schools Campaign ([www.healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org)) has produced a "Quick & Easy Guide to Green Cleaning," which will soon be released for national distribution. State and dry governments are also beginning to issue Green Cleaning guides.

A factor in considering the costs is that the discussion of Green Cleaning programs at campuses is more commonly taking place at the senior executive administrator and facility manager levels, thanks to organizations such as the U.S. Green Building Council. Thus, the value of Green Cleaning is not just its potential, but also the transformational effect it is having on cleaning as it engages the people that truly make the decisions.

Ultimately, facility managers need to use the Greenest products in the best systems based on their unique needs. Just as we don't want to waste chemicals and paper, we don't want to waste labor either. Taking all of those issues into consideration, it turns out that Green Cleaning programs cost the same or less than traditional, non-Green Cleaning systems. Additionally, there is a growing body of evidence that Green Cleaning programs can have a significantly positive impact on building cleanliness, the health of occupants and an organization's ROI.

And, just imagine the benefits to campuses and this country when increased and superior cleaning, as a result of a Green Cleaning program, results in improved health and productivity of college students and staff; better health outcomes in health-care facilities; reductions in asthma rates and absenteeism; improved performance on academic tests; and the list could go on. Green Cleaning is a true win-win for all involved.

A 25+ year veteran of the cleaning industry, Steve Ashkin is the author of *Green Cleaning for Dummies* and a tireless advocate for environmentally preferable cleaning products. Often referred to as the "father of green cleaning," you can get more information at [www.ashkingroup.com](http://www.ashkingroup.com).

**G**reen Cleaning offers an incredible opportunity to contribute to the health and productivity of students, professors and all building occupants. In Green Cleaning, the highest priority begins with the needs of the building's occupants and the environment -not costs, efficiencies, appearances, etc. Fortunately, an increasing number of campuses have discovered that efforts to improve the environmental health of their buildings also have produced some unexpected benefits. Case studies show that switching from traditional cleaning methods to a Green Cleaning program has a positive affect on school budgets as well as the health of students and teachers. So, while the issues of costs, efficiencies and appearances are critical, they are but the means to an end of externalities. The real question is, "what are the ends and how do we internalize those things (including products and processes) that are sustainable for institutions of higher learning, the environment, workers and the facility management industry?"

The simplest definition of Green Cleaning is "cleaning to protect health without harming the environment." This simple definition brings together two important concepts. First, there is the need to focus on human health -both the building occupants and the cleaning staff. The second concept recognizes the huge environmental impacts associated with the cleaning industry.

Most facility managers understand the important role cleaning plays in protecting people's health. However, many cleaning products, including cleaning chemicals and many plastic products, are made from petroleum, a limited and non-renewable natural resource. In addition, some cleaning chemicals contribute to smog formation and contaminate water. The energy used during cleaning also contributes to environmental burdens.

A Green Cleaning program can reduce exposure to toxic ingredients through the use of environmentally-preferable cleaning products and appropriate staff training. The health of all campus building occupants are better protected by a Green Cleaning program.

### DIFFERENT SHADES OF GREEN?

Green is not static; there is no "bar" that once you cross it you're Green, rather it is a process of continual improvement. The biggest misconception about Green is that it is product-focused. Green Cleaning is not simply replacing a traditional chemical with a "certified" Green alternative. While this step is often the first in a series of efforts, Green Cleaning is a strategy that re-thinks how to create a healthy, high performing building, which, at the same time, minimizes impacts on the environment.

Green Cleaning programs begin by assessing the needs of the building occupants and examine all products, including chemicals, paper, vacuums and other equipment, mats, waste and recycling containers, microfiber, source control and pollution prevention strategies, etc.

