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Shared Responsibility: The Roles People Play

TODAY'S GREEN CLEANING highlights the need for green products and processes that reduce the risk of harm to product users, which can include chemicals that can burn eyes or skin, or equipment that can cause musculoskeletal injuries. But, one opportunity that contractors should address is shared responsibility.

Shared responsibility is a simple concept that saw its origin during the development of ASTM's Standard Guide on Stewardship for Cleaning Commercial and Institutional Buildings (ASTM E-1971). The concept simply recognizes that all building staff, occupants, visitors and outside service providers make an impact on the health, safety and environmental impacts associated with a building. And, in order for us to optimize the built environment, it is necessary that everyone who has an impact take responsibility for that impact.

Some examples of how different stake-holders impact the health, safety and environment include:

- Occupants who bring food and eat in their offices can spill drinks and drop crumbs, which can attract vermin, potentially requiring the use of pesticides
- Occupants who have boxes, papers, and files strewn across floors, desks and other surfaces, which makes vacuuming and dusting difficult, or which diverts custodial time from protecting health to tidying up
- Occupants who, in their effort to help clean and maintain their personal areas, may bring in and use household products that are high in VOCs or respiratory irritants and have other problematic attributes that can effect other occupants and the environment.

Shared responsibility is not just limited to building occupants. Examples of how other stakeholders may impact the indoor environment include:

- Outside contractors such as roofers or mechanical contractors maybe using chemicals that can contribute potentially harmful contaminants throughout a building
- Senior management using custodians as personal maids, delivery persons or errand runners; or, visitors such as community groups who use school facilities after-hours, but leave their mess for custodians to clean up, both of which divert limited and valuable cleaning resources.

While many building owners are reluctant to develop policies to address occupant behavior, there are real benefits for them to do so. These efforts can result in real bottom-line business advantages, because worker productivity and quality, student performance on standardized tests and health outcomes can all be improved through the creation of healthier indoor environments.

Shared responsibility can also be a powerful "green" business strategy. It can add value for our customers and create a competitive advantage. And, by getting others to recognize their impacts and share in the responsibility for creating a healthy and productive indoor environment, we can frequently increase our efficiencies and improve our profit margins.

The Ashkin Group is one of the nation's leading consulting firms working to green the cleaning industry. 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," Ashkin has played a pivotal role in setting industry standards, promoting environmentally preferable products, and advocating for socially responsible practices. For more information or to subscribe to his e-newsletter, DestinationGreen, visit www.ashkingroup.com.