

Green Cleaning

This tip sheet corresponds with Green Star Award Standard #5 – Reduce the Use and Improve Management of Hazardous Materials and Wastes. Another useful tool is “Becoming a Green Star: A Waste Prevention Guide for Anchorage Businesses.” You can find the guide online in pdf and html format at www.greenstarinc.org/guideindex.php or request a hard copy from Green Star.

Why Use Green Cleaning Products?

Conventional cleaning products today may contain heavy metals, formaldehyde, VOCs, carcinogens and other toxins. We don't necessarily know the long-term effects of all of these chemical compounds and products. Green cleaning products and services offer a safer, less toxic alternative.

Results from the National Toxicology Program indicate there are an estimated 80,000 different chemical compounds in use around the world. Approximately 4,000 to 8,000 of these chemicals are expected to be carcinogenic.

Every year companies send 2,000 more chemicals to the U.S. EPA for approval and under the Toxic Substances Control Act, the U.S. EPA cannot require manufacturers to study the health effects of new chemicals they introduce unless the agency can demonstrate a substance poses significant risk.

In 2003, the Environmental Working Group estimated that fewer than half of all the chemicals submitted for approval to the U.S. EPA were backed up by basic toxicity data and 80% of the chemical compounds were approved in less than three weeks.

There are known toxins and carcinogens, which consumers can knowingly avoid. The most certain method of avoiding unhealthy chemicals is to purchase certified green cleaning products.



Green Cleaning Practices

There is more to green cleaning than choosing environmentally friendly products. Good cleaning practices also can reduce negative health impacts for employees, save money, ensure legal requirements are met and protect the environment.

Improper handling of chemical cleaners can result in lost time from injuries such as eye, skin and lung irritation or burns. Accidents can happen when workers are not properly trained how to safely complete their tasks, when they do not receive follow-up training throughout employment, when they are misusing equipment, or when they hurry to complete a job. By using proper “green” cleaning practices, these issues can be reduced or avoided.



Key Environmental Attributes

When evaluating green cleaning products, look for products that include one or more of the following environmental attributes.

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| Phosphate Free | Low or No VOCs |
| Formaldehyde Free | No known carcinogens |
| Chlorine Free | No heavy metals |
| Non-Toxic | No ozone-depleting compounds |
| Non-Corrosive | Natural Base |
| Non-Combustible | |
| Biodegradable | |

Green cleaning practices can significantly improve worker health, decrease environmental impact and reduce the likelihood of accidents. Changing the fixed habits of workers may be the hardest thing to change, but is potentially the most effective.

Company cleaning procedures should be available in Standard Operating Procedure manuals, employees should be trained upon being hired and should receive continual training on proper techniques throughout their employment. Standard Operating Procedure manuals should include proper storage, dilution, application and disposal of chemicals and necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning schedules.

Good green cleaning procedures

- Clean entryways daily and use mats in entryways to collect dirt and particulates, which can easily be tracked through the rest of the business.
- Use re-usable cloths and mop heads instead of paper towels and disposable mop heads.
- Use dispensers that automatically dilute chemicals to help avoid spills and high chemical concentrations.
- Train staff to use just enough product.

Green Cleaning Services

When looking for a cleaning service, be sure to ask if the company has a green cleaning option and what chemicals they use in its green cleaning line. Before you sign a contract, do a little research into the chemicals the cleaning service uses and look for the key environmental criteria listed in this tip sheet. Be sure to ask about their cleaning practices as well as products. Once you find a green cleaning company and are happy with the products and practices used, be sure approved chemicals and practices are included in your contract. This will help guarantee the company uses only the green cleaning chemicals and practices you have approved.

Green Cleaning Resources

Green Star's Green Products Database
www.greenstarinc.org/html/resources.php

Greening the Department of the Interior -
Green Cleaning Practices
www.doi.gov/greening/sustain/practice.html

Western Regional Pollution Prevention Network -
www.westp2net.org/Janitorial/jp4.cfm

Inform Green Cleaning Toolkit
<http://informinc.org/toolkit.php>

Demystifying Cleaning Certifications

Below are just a few examples of certifications for cleaning products.



DfE or Design for the Environment is a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency program that "works in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders to reduce risk to people and the environment by preventing pollution." DfE standards for cleaning products combine the rate of biodegradation and level of toxicity. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/dfe.



Green Seal is an independent non-profit organization. Green Seal's standards ensure that cleaning products carrying the logo are non-toxic, non-corrosive, non-combustible, biodegradable, concentrated for use in cold water, have recyclable packaging, are not tested on animals and contain safe VOC levels when diluted. Green Seal certified cleaning products contain no phosphates, EDTA or NTA, ozone-depleting compounds, known carcinogens, heavy metals, chlorine bleach, optical brighteners, cross-linked polymers or petroleum distillates. Complete standards for certified products, and more information on certification can be found at www.greenseal.org.



GREENGUARD is a third-party certification for indoor air quality, which covers a wide range of interior products. Certified cleaners comply with standards on both acute and chronic levels of VOCs and formaldehyde. The organization also sets standards for levels of chronic noncancer toxins, acute noncancer toxins, developmental/reproductive toxins and phthalates. Complete standards for certified products, and more information on certification can be found at www.greenguard.org.



EcoLogo or Environmental Choice is a Canadian, third-party certification managed by TerraChoice Environmental Marketing and backed by the Canadian government. EcoLogo has different standards for different cleaning products, which can be found at www.ecologo.org.



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