

Green Floor Care

By Dawn Shoemaker for M Supplies

Editor: Susan Moore

In the last few years, the jansan industry has undergone a real transformation in the way distributors work with their clients. At one time, many jansan distributors would call on their current and new clients and introduce them to a cleaning product or piece of equipment, describing its features and benefits and why it would work well in their facility.

However, today many distributors are wearing an entirely new hat, according to James Hlavin, head of business development at Tornado Industries, a leading manufacturer of professional cleaning tools and equipment. "They still show their clients new cleaning tools and products, but more and more, they are becoming cleaning consultants," Hlavin says. Much of this is due to the growing interest in, and conversion to, Green cleaning. "Their customers are turning to them to guide, even spearhead, a facility's transfer from conventional to environmentally preferable cleaning systems."

When it comes to floor care, this is especially evident. Many end customers, and indeed some distributors are surprised to find out just how much of a negative impact floor cleaning, polishing, and maintenance can have on the environment – especially waterways when wastewater is poured down drains. This is because some of the chemicals used in floor care are among the most powerful and potentially harmful in the industry, often containing zinc, heavy metals, carcinogens or reproductive toxins, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and many other potent ingredients.

Although these cleaning chemicals have performed admirably for years and benefited distributors well, new technologies have produced a number of environmentally preferable floor care chemicals that have less impact on health and the environment. But cleaning chemicals are just one component in a Green floor care system. Using environmentally preferable products and equipment and establishing a Green floor care plan are also part of the system.

Green Floor Care Products

Some of the other components in a Green floor care system include the use of microfiber mop heads, vapor steam cleaners, and environmentally protective floor care equipment.

Although some recent studies question how effective microfiber is at reducing bacteria and preventing cross-contamination, it is well known that microfiber is very absorbent and usually requires less water and chemical than conventional string mops. Floor care is often water intensive, so using less chemical—whether Green or not—is an important component of any Green cleaning program.

Vapor steam cleaners have increasingly more uses and cleaning possibilities because of Green cleaning. Since they use no chemicals at all, vapor steam cleaners are one of the most environmentally preferable types of cleaning equipment. Medical facilities often will use vapor steam cleaners to clean floors because they help kill germs and bacteria, leave the floor essentially dry after cleaning, and penetrate deep into tile, grout, and porous floors with little or no scrubbing.

While these are all significant components in floor care, Hlavin stresses that floor machines—scrubbers, buffers, burnishers—are the most important tools in floor care, and that they have become Greener in recent years. "Studies show that cylindrical floor machines – which have counter-rotating brushes on each side of the unit, rotating at 1,000 to 1,500 RPMs and at 3.5 psi (pounds per square inch) – use less water and chemical than conventional buffers and scrubbers," says Hlavin. "In addition, the brushes on these machines can be used over and over again, reducing waste."

Burnishers in a Green floor care program differ and have passive vacuum systems to protect indoor air quality. Operated by the machine's motor and not a separate unit, burnishers vacuum the dust and contaminants generated in floor work into the machine and trap them with high-filtration filters. Some of these machines have been evaluated and meet the stringent indoor air-quality requirements found in schools and health care facilities.

Selecting environmentally preferable cleaning products and equipment is an integral part of any Green cleaning system. However, without a Green floor care plan in place, the system will not work efficiently. According to Hlavin, jansan distributors take on a consulting role with their clients and should be well versed on Green floor care systems – including the hows and whys of a Green floor care plan.

Have a Plan

"I have yet to see a facility, large or small, that was not maintained more efficiently than when a cleaning plan was instituted," says Hlavin. Among other things, the plan details when cleaning tasks are to be performed, how often, and with what products, chemicals, and equipment. "In order for Green cleaning to work properly, including a Green floor care program, some type of a plan must be established," says Hlavin. "Moreover, it should be in writing, so it becomes a formalized Green cleaning and floor care contract and guide, informing all major stakeholders about what is being done, when, and why."

The key steps to the Green floor care plan include:

Organize the team. Usually the team comprises the custodial crew, as well as the facility's manager and a few building occupants. The team works together throughout the process, and continues afterward, to make sure the devised Green floor care system meets its goals and specific benchmarks.

Analyze the current situation. No plan can begin unless all parties analyze and evaluate the current floor care program, which includes the entire floor cleaning/refinishing/pdishing systems currently in place in the facility. It also includes an examination of the cleaning chemicals used to maintain the floors, the cleaning methods incorporated, and the tools, products, and equipment used for the facility's floor maintenance.

Develop the plan. With a strong understanding of the existing floor care program, the team examines each item to see where an environmentally preferable product or procedure can be substituted. In some

cases, this is rather simple. For instance, Green-certified floor care chemicals can replace conventional chemicals. In other situations, such as with the equipment and methods used to maintain the floors, it may be more complicated.

Implement the plan. The team implements the plan, making sure everyone is clear about why certain products and procedures are being replaced or changed and how this will improve the health of the facility and impact the environment less. This involves reaching out beyond the major stakeholders to all who use the facility. When building occupants know why changes are being implemented in a facility, especially if it is to protect their health, they are usually more patient should problems arise.

Evaluate the plan. Although the Green floor care plan is formalized, that does not mean it is written in stone. Facilities are living, breathing places. They will change and, as a result, the Green floor care plan may also need to be changed. Also, many end customers experiment with several Green cleaning products and equipment before they find the ones that work best for them.

The Distributor's Role Today

When Arthur Miller wrote the play *Death of a Salesman* in 1949, his main character, Willy Loman, was a traveling salesman trying to hawk his goods whenever and wherever possible. Hlavin relates Loman to jansan distributors. He says, "Although certainly not as sad or pitiful, many jansan distributors of the era also viewed themselves primarily as salespeople, looking for new customers whenever and wherever they could find them."

Although the world of sales has changed dramatically over the years, jansan distributors' role and the importance of their work have raised respect and standing with their customers. Hlavin adds that Green cleaning and concerns about cleaning's impact on health and the environment have elevated jansan distributors' stature even more.

"Green cleaning has made us guides, leading our customers through the intricacies and necessities of a Green cleaning program," says Hlavin. "While this is true with all facets of Green cleaning, it is possibly most relevant in floor care because in most facilities, a Green floor care program serves as a foundation for the entire Green cleaning system."

Dawn Shoemaker is a communications professional working specifically with the cleaning and building industries. She may be reached at 773-525-3021.