

**E**nvironmentally preferable products have not been a success with commercial and residential consumers despite all the press they have received and the great increase in public awareness about environmental issues, says a report from the Roper Center, a public opinion research firm associated with Yale University.

According to the report, the public actually has a very laissez-faire attitude toward Green issues, including Green cleaning products, which has made them complacent, even uninterested, in environmentally preferable products in general.

“People talk about the Green market, but I don’t believe there really is one,” says Harvey Hartman, president and founder of the Hartman Group, Bellevue, WA, a consulting firm that specializes in environmental strategies. “We’ve gotten on an emotional bandwagon with this subject. We’ve developed a sense that the environment is more important in most people’s daily lives than it really is.”

There are some in our industry who may agree with these comments and believe that the importance of green cleaning products is more razzle-dazzle than reality. However, I would encourage these people to stop and take a few minutes for a quick reality check. The comments and the report referenced were released in July 1997, almost 10 years ago, and in that time green cleaning has gone from a fad to a marketing angle to one of the most significant components in commercial cleaning.

## Jan/San Industry: Stuck No More

Many other things have happened in our industry in the past decade as well. No longer stuck with old equipment, cleaning procedures, and technologies, many people throughout the industry would agree that the past 10 years have seen more changes, more new products developed and introduced, and a much greater emphasis on the importance of cleaning than ever before. And most of the new products, at least the ones that are successful, share three components: they are efficient, effective, and *green*.

You can see this in each of the major product categories in our industry—floor machines, carpet extractors, vacuum cleaners, and cleaning chemicals. Nearly all the products that are selling well and proving their worth in the jan/san marketplace have demonstrated that they work efficiently, are effective in providing high-quality cleaning performance, and help reduce cleaning’s impact on the environment. A close look at these four product categories shows that this is true.

### Floor Machines

When floors are buffed or polished, a thin layer of dust is generated as the machine actually “sands” the top layer of the floor’s finish to help produce a shine. This dust can become airborne, potentially harming the health of the cleaning professional as well as building occupants.

Additionally, the chemicals used to clean, strip, and refinish floors are some of the most powerful in the industry. Floor equipment that provides satisfactory results, helps decrease the number of scrub, recoat, and/or strip cycles, and is able to accomplish this with less chemical helps make floor care greener.

Cylindrical machines that have passive vacuum systems to help trap contaminants before they become airborne tackle both dust and chemical use issues. And they are a growing trend in commercial floor care equipment.

Instead of a rotating disc, cylindrical machines have counter-rotating brushes at each end of the machine, which rotate at 1,000 to 1,500 rpm. They use less water and chemicals than conventional floor machines, which helps to make them more environmentally preferable, and because the brushes turn inward, into the machine’s base, dust and debris are better trapped under the machine’s shroud and less likely to become airborne.

Also, more machines in North America now have passive vacuum systems, including a deck shroud that helps traps dust and contaminants so they are not released into the air. The machine’s motor is also used as a vacuum, collecting dust and debris as the machine is used and depositing it into filters.

By Mike Sawchuk

## Carpet Extractors

One of the concerns related to conventional carpet extraction is the excessive amount of moisture that can be left in the carpet. This happens when the machine uses too much water or solution in the extraction process or the vacuum system is not efficient enough to remove the excess moisture.

This moisture can potentially damage the structural integrity of the carpet, shortening its life expectancy, and get trapped in the carpet's matting as well. If the carpet is wet for more than 24 hours, the possibility of mold and mildew developing increases significantly.

However, newer, more advanced, low-moisture, hot-water extractors can help eliminate all of these problems and help green carpet cleaning as well.

Low-moisture extractors use a gallon of water or less per minute during the extraction process; this compares to three or more gallons per minute with a conventional extractor. Less water, along with improved vacuum systems, can cut drying time to as little as 30 minutes.

To make vacuum components even more effective, some low-moisture machines have multistage vacuum systems. Additionally, on some machines, the vacuum system is placed just inches from the carpet, at the boot of the machine. This helps improve the vacuum's effectiveness as well.

## Vacuum Cleaners

Vacuum cleaners play a significant role in green cleaning. All models, including uprights, backpacks, and canisters, can release dust and debris through the filter bag and other openings in the machine. This can harm indoor air quality, and the problem can grow worse as the machine ages and with the tough use and abuse it may experience in commercial cleaning settings.

Selecting more technologically advanced, high-filtration vacuum cleaners can minimize this problem. High-efficiency particulate absorbing machines have long been known to help. In addition, greener vacuum cleaners are now *true*-HEPA, which means that the filter has been tested and the user is assured of the filtering quali-

ty. On some machines, it also means that the entire casing is airtight, helping to prevent dust and exhaust from escaping. Both components help protect the indoor environment.

Fortunately, different certifying organizations, such as the Carpet and Rug Institute and Tandus, a major manufacturer of floor coverings, now evaluate vacuum cleaners as well as extractors. This helps consumers select the greenest machines as well as the most efficient ones.

## Cleaning Chemicals

Just a few years ago, there were no major jan/san chemical manufacturers producing green cleaning chemicals. Those advocating green cleaning often found themselves "preaching to the choir" but finding few in the industry believing green cleaning chemicals would ever play a major role in commercial cleaning.

However, that changed for two major reasons:

First, in 1992, President Bill Clinton signed executive order 13101, which directed all government offices to phase in the use of "products or services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose." Because the federal government is such a major purchaser of cleaning products, manufacturers began to develop green chemicals to meet this huge customer's demands.

Second, the development of organizations such as the EcoLogo<sup>™</sup> program and Green Seal<sup>®</sup> helped establish parameters for all segments of

the industry. These independent, third-party certifying organizations helped remove the confusion as to what is and is not environmentally preferable.

This also provided a framework for chemical manufacturers to develop cleaning chemicals that meet the required criteria. And it also helped assure the distributor selling the products, as well as the end user, that the chemicals are indeed safer to use, are healthier for not only the users but for all building occupants, and help protect the environment as well.

## Next Phase

The green cleaning revolution is not only having a profound impact on the jan/san industry, it appears to be reverberating and creating other revolutions as well. One of the most significant is the development of cleaning standards for end users.

Different organizations are now in the process of developing such standards. And although the process may take a few more years and need further evaluation before acceptance, two things are true. The standards will help raise the bar for cleaning quality, making it more efficient and effective. In addition, it will help elevate our industry. Protecting health and the environment will become synonymous with proper cleaning using environmentally preferable cleaning products. •

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