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For many years, Green cleaning products were considered expensive and their performance standards were sometimes perceived as less than satisfactory. Because of this, many facility managers chose not to adopt a Green cleaning strategy. Further, there was a considerable amount of misinformation, resulting in concerns over "greenwashing," which is when a manufacturer, distributor, or service provider overstates or misinterprets the environmental attributes of a cleaning chemical, tool or piece of equipment. This caused confusion and again forced many facility managers to postpone selecting Green cleaning products.

Fortunately, most of these issues are behind us and we are now finding facility managers who tell their janitorial distributors, "We are now ready to go Green." That's the good news. What managers should prepare themselves for is that there are specific steps to Greening a facility. It is not hard and it can be done in-house - in fact, it should be done in-house with the help of a Green advisor, typically a janitorial distributor.

The following describes some of the key steps in the "Greening process," why they are necessary, and how they all work together to make sure a facility adopts a Green cleaning system that is workable and fits their specific needs.

Steps to Green Cleaning Success

Although all of the steps in the Greening process are important, possibly the most important one is the first, and that is the decision to go Green. This is a top-down decision. Top management in the facility, company, or school district must decide the

time has come to adopt a Green cleaning program. Once this decision is made the Green cleaning process can progress to the following steps:

Form a Green Team: Typically, this Team is made up of building management, key building occupants/users, the organization's janitorial distributor, and the custodial crew. They will follow the process from start to finish, deciding what steps to take as the program progresses. Further, they are to communicate with all key stakeholders, keeping building management, users, and cleaning staff abreast of their progress. This helps keep everyone involved and onboard.

Benchmark: In order to move forward, you must benchmark current procedures and supplies. This is a form of audit where all of the cleaning chemicals, tools, and equipment used throughout the facility are cataloged.

The benchmarking process should also delve a bit deeper and investigate if there are problem cleaning areas in a facility. "Complaint" areas are often located where tenants complain of inadequate cleaning or such things as allergies, sneezing, poor indoor air quality, etc. In one situation, a female staffer complained frequently that she developed respiratory problems while at her desk. Managers assumed there was a problem with the air conditioning system. However, during the benchmarking process, it was discovered that mold had developed in books next to her workspace. With the books removed, the worker's respiratory problems disappeared.

Prepare a plan: The benchmarking process should provide the Green Team with a fairly good understanding of what cleaning products are used in the facility, where they are used, and if there are any problem cleaning areas. It should also allow the Team to decide where Green cleaning products can be used now, in the near future, and in the more distant future (see next step). Once completed, it also involves communicating with all stakeholders on what will happen next.

In most cases, this communication should start with the actual cleaning workers. The products, tools, and equipment they may have used for years are now going to be replaced with environmentally preferable equivalents. There often is some reluctance when this occurs and the Team must explain Green cleaning is being adopted to protect workers' health, occupants' health, as well as the environment. The same type of discussion is necessary for building users as well as facility management.

Out with the old...in with the new: The next step involves working with the janitorial distributor to select Green cleaning tools and equipment. In some cases, different products will need to be tested to verify that they meet performance requirements. Always remember, just because two or more products are Green and used for the same purpose, it does not necessarily mean they are the same. As with all products, their performance must be evaluated.

The bigger problem deals with equipment. Although it has not been emphasized specifically, Green cleaning involves far more than cleaning chemicals. It also entails such equipment as:

Vacuum cleaners with high-efficiency air filtration systems to protect indoor air quality

Low moisture floor machines or, more specifically, cylindrical brush floorcare equipment that use considerably less water and chemical than conventional floorcare equipment

Carpet extractors that use water and chemical more effectively. Some portable extractors even recycle cleaning water and solution, dramatically reducing water and chemical consumption

Carpet extractor wands that incorporate "moisture control" systems to minimize the amount of water released into the carpet and maximize the amount recovered during the extraction process.

Implement, begin, review: It is now time to begin Green cleaning. The process may involve some initial custodial worker training on how the products are to be properly used, but this can also serve as "refresher" training for cleaning workers on the most effective cleaning procedures. As the program progresses, the Green Team should review its progress on a regular basis. This should also include meeting with key stakeholders and users of the facility to find out their thoughts on the program and how it is progressing.

A final step in the Green cleaning process actually involves everyone that works or uses the facility. Everyone needs to be onboard and realize that all building users share in the responsibility of maintaining a healthy, productive, and Green indoor environment.

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