

By MIKE SAWCHUK, Vice President, Enviro-Solutions

**T**he Canadian cleaning industry has been eager to understand Green cleaning and, taking that an important step further, to implement it in the facilities they maintain. Typically, it is the end-use customer who initially requests that environmentally preferable cleaning tools, products and procedures be used in a facility. But many Canadian cleaning contractors have taken the first step by approaching their clients and suggesting that Green cleaning is healthier cleaning, is more environmentally responsible, and is the future of cleaning. This is definitely a feather in the cap of the Canadian cleaning industry.

However, as I always tell our distributors, Green cleaning is a journey: there is really no end point. As such, let us review some of the principles of Green cleaning and address some new developments in its evolution.

#### **What is Green Cleaning?**

We can define Green cleaning as a cleaning process that is both effective and protective of health and the environment. It is the use of cleaning chemicals, tools and equipment, procedures and frequencies that

work very well but have reduced negative impact on the user, building occupants and the environment.

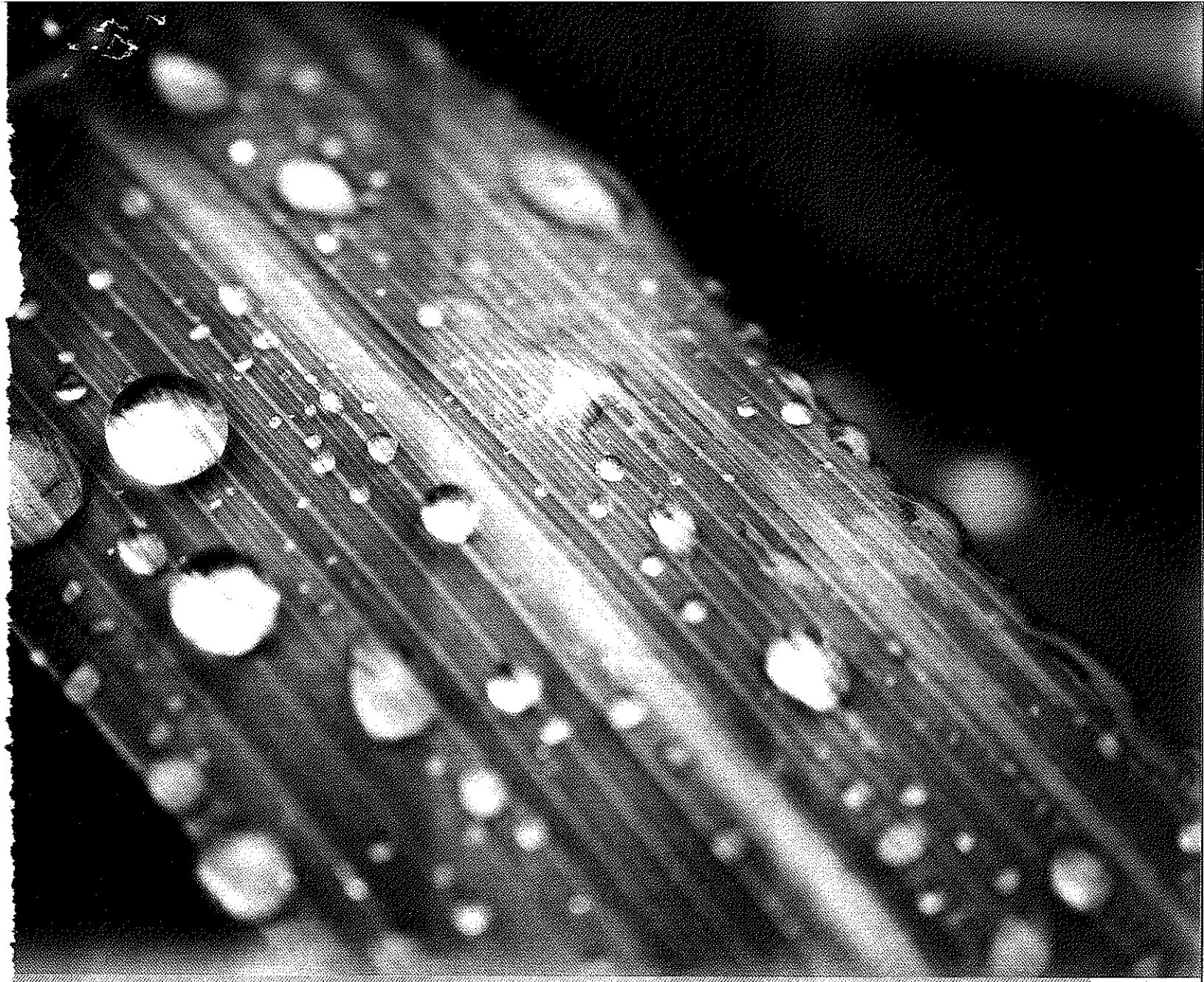
#### **What Makes Chemicals Green?**

Being able to clearly define what makes the cleaning chemical green is one of the hallmarks of the Green movement. At one time people promoted environmentally preferable cleaning products without anyone clearly defining what they are or, worse, every manufacturer, distributor or end user having a different definition. The confu-



sion likely stalemated the entire journey. These days, a product is proven Green if it has been tested by an independent, third-

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party organization and found to meet specific standards, criteria established by credible certification organizations such as EcoLogo™, Green Seal®, or DfE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Design for the Environment program.

#### **What are Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) and Why Are They an Issue in Green Cleaning?**

VOCs are made up of carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, chlorine and other compounds that vaporize or can form gases that are released into the air. Essentially, they cause indoor air pollution. They are found in all kinds of products from glue and paint to carpeting and wallpaper. The big concern about VOCs is that they can be harmful to human health, especially children's health. For a cleaning product to be Green certi-

fied, it typically must have no or very low amounts of VOCs.

#### **Are there Green-certified equivalents for all cleaning chemicals?**

The industry is getting closer to having a Green product for every need. At one time, some leaders in North America's professional cleaning industry predicted that by now 80 per cent of the chemicals marketed would be conventional and only 20 per cent would be Green. What we are seeing is the opposite is true. About 80 per cent or more of the chemicals most commonly used for cleaning have Green-certified equivalents. Floor finishes has been one of the few areas where some manufacturers are still finding it difficult to develop a more environmentally preferable equivalent that performs as well and is com-

petitive in price to traditional alternatives. However, some finishes are now available that are certified, effective and, in some cases, perform even better than their conventional counterparts, although they are still a bit more expensive.

#### **Don't all Green cleaning chemicals perform about the same?**

The answer is a big NO. Do all conventional cleaning chemicals perform the same? Again, the answer is no. Cleaning contractors should put the different Green cleaning chemicals to a challenge and see how well they perform in the locations they clean. Are they cost effective? Are they easy to use? This is one of many areas where a distributor who is known as the local "Green cleaning expert" can really come in

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handy. He or she will likely be attuned to the different Green products available and which work best in which situations.

### Are only chemicals Green?

Certainly not anymore. Floor machines are now available that are effective using just water in many basic cleaning situations. Others are designed so that the operator can switch between chemical and water while cleaning, minimizing the amount of chemical necessary, which it may be, especially when performing more difficult floorcare tasks. Extractors are also getting Greener. The Carpet and Rug Institute, through its Seal of Approval program, has established fairly stringent criteria that require carpet extractors to meet certain performance and moisture-removal standards so that carpets dry faster. Typically, these are low-moisture machines designed to help carpets dry within approximately two hours. And lest we forget, vacuum cleaners with HEPA or high-filtration filters are also a key component of the Green cleaning arsenal.

### What are bioenzymatic cleaning chemicals, and are they Green?

Bioenzymatic cleaners are products specifically formulated to dispose of soils safely, economically and rapidly. They contain the necessary blend of specific enzymes and benevolent bacteria to digest chemical and organic waste that would normally create odors and feed germs. These microorganisms and enzymes, as they do in nature, break down the waste, converting it into two basic compounds: carbon dioxide and water.

Some of these are Green, and some are not. To determine whether a bioenzymatic cleaning product is certified Green, look for the certification label or marking of one of the certification organizations mentioned earlier, as would be the case with any Green-certified cleaning product.

### Are bioenzymatic and biorenewable cleaning chemicals the same?

No. They are actually subcategories of bio-based cleaning chemicals. As the name implies, a biorenewable cleaning chemical

is made from renewable ingredients such as corn, soy or other agricultural products. A bioenzymatic cleaning chemical, as we defined earlier, is made from bacteria and enzymes that not only clean a surface but also eat away at bacteria, grease, microorganisms and other contaminants. Because of this, bioenzymatic cleaners are excellent for eliminating odors from tile and grout areas and continue to work for as long as 80 hours after they have been applied to a surface. Bioenzymatic cleaners are a specific subset of biorenewable but, depending upon the type and amount of surfactant and fragrance used, may or may not meet the USDA criteria for Bio-Preferred. And again, for both bioenzymatic and biorenewable, ensure the product is Green certified.

### Can lists of ingredients be found on all Green cleaning products?

Not at this time. Some manufacturers such as Enviro-Solutions do disclose 100 per cent of the ingredients. But Stephen Ashkin, president of The Ashkin Group and commonly known as the "father of Green cleaning," is advocating that all cleaning products, Green and conventional, list all key ingredients.\* With this information in hand, users can select Green and conventional cleaning products based on where they are used. For instance, some products may not be the most suitable for locations where small children are present but may work perfectly well in office-type environments. Simply knowing what is in the product helps users make more informed decisions, which can protect their health as well as the health of the facilities they clean.

\* Note that the full ingredients and formula must be disclosed to the certification bodies.

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