



GREEN CLEANING IS MORE THAN CHEMICALS

By Robert Kravitz

Last fall, a relatively small and select group of building service contractors (BSCs) met to learn more about green cleaning. What made them unique was the fact that they were the senior managers of some of the largest professional cleaning companies in North America. Their firms clean hundreds of millions of square feet of office space and employ thousands of people.

The conference, hosted by Enviro-Solutions, a manufacturer of green cleaning products, was held in a resort community in Canada, just north of Niagara Falls. The presenters sought to help the BSCs better understand green cleaning—using products and services that help reduce the impact of cleaning on the environment. Another goal was to help those attending understand why they should become more familiar with green cleaning, why their customers may increasingly ask for it, and just what green cleaning entails.

Although a few of the cleaning companies present were already involved with green cleaning, most knew relatively little about the subject. In fact, except for those contractors cleaning government-owned facilities, many which now require the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products and systems, all said that they had heard of green cleaning, but few had received requests for it. How-



ever, all agreed that they do expect the demand to increase significantly in coming years.

Why Would a Customer Want Green Cleaning?

“For the most part, green cleaning is customer-driven,” Mike Sawchuk, vice president and general manager of Enviro-Solutions, told the group. “Although government entities in both the United States and Canada encourage—indeed, some even require—the use of environmentally preferable products, most private facilities adopt green cleaning because they want to.”

According to Sawchuk, what seems to be spreading throughout North America and many other areas of the world is a greater awareness that many traditional cleaning chemicals are potentially harmful, containing carcinogens, toxins, neurotoxins, and other substances that can harm cleaning workers, building occupants and the environment. Parents are particularly concerned about the dramatic increase in asthma and other respiratory illnesses, which some experts now believe are often triggered by the ingredients in some traditional cleaning products.

“If a child becomes ill, sparked by the use of a traditional cleaning product, he or she often misses school, which can reduce money going to the school district

because funding is often tied to attendance. In addition, it may cause a parent to miss work, which can cost an employer money,” explains Sawchuk. “Green cleaning is helping us to realize how closely tied we all are to the way our indoor environments are cleaned and maintained. A healthy indoor environment can help prevent an unfortunate and costly chain of events.”

Indeed, many school administrators, business owners and facility managers now realize green cleaning has value. Some recent studies suggest that student performance actually improves, absenteeism declines, worker productivity is enhanced, and tenant retention and satisfaction increase when environmentally preferable products are used in cleaning.

“Green cleaning is no longer just for ‘tree huggers’ and environmentalists,” says Sawchuk. “Now we know it has tangible bread-and-butter benefits. That is why we can expect the demand for green cleaning to increase in the near future.”

The Green Cleaning Components

Green cleaning can result in a healthier environment, but exactly what is it? Is it simply a matter of transferring from traditional to more environmentally preferable cleaning chemicals?