

# Explaining green benefits to employees



*When switching to green, staff communication is key.*

By: Armando Rodriguez



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When we read articles about green cleaning, they most often deal with how to implement a green cleaning program, how to select environmentally preferable products, or the benefits of green cleaning for building occupants and the environment.

What is less often discussed is how to introduce green cleaning to cleaning professionals and the potential benefits it may offer.

This is quite an oversight since these are the people who are using the cleaning chemicals, tools, and equipment every day and are the ones most directly affected by their use.

The most likely reason this group is overlooked is that facility managers and building owners are usually the ones making the decision to “go green,” with the cleaning contractor and his or her staff simply following their lead.

However, what they may not realize is that the cleaning crew can make or break any green implementation.

And, given the fact that some cleaning profes-

sionals have had poor experiences with environmentally preferable cleaning products in the past, there is a natural reluctance to try them once again.

## Introducing green cleaning

When introducing green cleaning systems to a facility, usually the first question that cleaning workers ask is, why?

After all, in many cases, custodial workers will point out that the cleaning products they have used for years have worked well.

One of the best ways to answer this question is to tell cleaning workers that green cleaning is simply a different way to think about cleaning.

It means that a building is cleaned not just for appearance but to promote human and environmental health as well.

However, implementing the program requires thorough and continuing training of staff and clear communication so that they understand the goals of green cleaning along with how to use the products.

They must learn how to use the green products, and this is often a great opportunity to reeducate workers on proper cleaning techniques.

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If green cleaning products are misused or used with the wrong cleaning procedures due to improper training, their benefits may be compromised.

To ease concerns that some cleaning workers may have about the effectiveness of green products, encourage your staff to use the green cleaning products and compare them to the conventional products currently in use.

What is usually discovered is that many environmentally preferable cleaning products are as effective as — if not better than — comparable conventional products.

Once this comparison is complete, the hesitancy and concerns about using new cleaning products and new cleaning methods tend to be eliminated.

### **Health benefits: A case study**

One of the key benefits of using green cleaning products is related to cleaning worker health and performance, and the

following case study bears this out.

According to John Hayes, regional sales manager for Enviro-Solutions, a manufacturer of green cleaning products, a small Florida resort found it easier to outsource its hotel cleaning needs to a local building service contractor (BSC) and for the most part, this worked well.

However, after about a year, the owners became concerned about the health of the cleaning workers.

The BSC selected all of the cleaning chemicals and products used by his workers.

But toward the end of each shift, the owners noticed that many of the workers left the hotel with red, teary eyes.

Sometimes their cheeks would be puffy and red as well.

The resort owner expressed their concerns to the BSC, says Hayes, and suggested that the problem could be caused by some of the powerful chemicals used to clean the hotel.

Different chemicals were substituted,

but the redness continued.

Finally, the BSC transferred to green-certified cleaning products and instituted a green cleaning system for the resort.

To everyone's surprise, Hayes says that soon after introducing the green products, the workers' redness and eye irritation disappeared.

In addition, although nothing could be pinpointed specifically, overall it seemed that the cleaning performance was improved and more thorough, which made the resort owners happy as well.

This case is important for a variety of reasons.

First, it clearly shows the impact that some conventional cleaning chemicals can have on cleaning workers and how these problems can be rectified by transferring to environmentally preferable cleaning products.

But what should also be noted is how the resort owners believed the overall cleaning of the facility improved once a green clean-

ing system was incorporated.

This was not necessarily the result of more effective cleaning products.

Instead, the workers were retrained using the new green cleaning products and, because the adverse reaction of the conventional cleaning products had been eliminated, the workers were able to put more time and energy into their work, resulting in more thorough — and appreciated — cleaning.

## Business benefits

Employee turnover and absenteeism in the contract cleaning industry have been common problems for years.

In fact, at one time turnover was estimated to be as high as 300 percent in certain parts of North America.

But, turnover and absenteeism can be reduced when green cleaning is implemented because the cleaning workers are less negatively affected by the equipment and chemicals they use.

Green cleaning can help reduce turnover and absenteeism and subsequently reduce hiring and training costs.

And often we find that when turnover is reduced, the BSC is able to provide a better and more consistent level of service.

This ties in with another benefit for contract cleaners: The reduction of insurance and worker's compensation claims.

Less use of harmful chemicals and non-ergonomic equipment means improved health for workers and fewer on-the-job accidents and injuries.

Also, insurance costs can go down just by switching to green cleaning.

## Marketing benefits

We are seeing more and more BSCs, large and small, market the fact that they now offer, or in some cases exclusively offer, green cleaning for their clients.

At one time, this could have been viewed as purely a marketing tool.

But today, as more facilities request the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products in their facilities, it is becoming virtually a necessity.

It is one of the few ways a BSC can distinguish themselves from their competitors.

A perception many facility managers

have about cleaning contractors is that they all offer essentially the same services.

As a result, price becomes the only differentiator.

The advantage for BSCs who embrace green cleaning is that they will not only remain competitive, but also gain a significant edge over others who do not take

green cleaning seriously.

## Altruistic motives

Other than health, business and marketing benefits, there is still one more significant benefit to incorporating green cleaning for cleaning workers and BSCs.

It has become, very simply, the right thing to do.

We may not have thought this or valued this as much just five years ago.

Reducing the occupational exposure for cleaning workers, some of whom are using very powerful chemicals and products for eight or more hours per day, makes going green right for our workers as well as for our businesses.

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