

## Green Certification Issues

A couple of years ago, one of the largest hotels in Chicago hosted a "Green Day." More than 140 vendors showcased their environmentally friendly products and services geared toward all industry segments, including the professional cleaning field.

"Protecting the environment is [now] a top priority for all industries," a hotel spokesperson said in announcing the event. The spokesperson also noted that environmental responsibility is not only good for the Earth but also good for business and the local community.

Just a day before the event, a chain of hotels with headquarters in Chicago announced the creation and appointment of a new position, vice president of environmental affairs. The appointee, Brigitta Witt, said her job goal was "awareness and education to promote and reinforce a culture of environmental consciousness" at her hotel and in the hotel industry in general.

These events reflect the continued expansion of the Green movement, a campaign started in the mid-1970s that has grown dramatically in the past few years. As exciting as this news is for those of us who have long advocated the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products, there are still mysteries to unravel as to what is really Green when it comes to cleaning products and what is not.

### Green or Greenwashed?

To help companies and consumers select products that are truly helpful to the environment and decipher the maze of product claims, EcoLogo™, a leading certification organization, recently conducted a survey reviewing the human health or environmental claims (approximately 4,996) made on

**Sin of Unverified Claims:** This is when a product makes Green claims but provides no verifiable certification or independent proof.

**Sin of Vagueness:** Products making meaningless claims like "all natural" or "eco-friendly," which do not provide consumers with any specific environmental information.

**Sin of Irrelevance:** Environmental attributes of a product are promoted, even though the manufacturer is just adhering to regulations that apply to all similar products made by all manufacturers. For instance, many products still claim to be chlorofluorocarbon-free, even though CFCs were banned 30 years ago.

**Sin of Relativism:** A product that may be less harmful than a conventional product but yet still is detrimental. A consumer may select "organic" cigarettes, for example, thinking they are less harmful but, in reality, should really stop smoking.

**Sin of Fibbing:** Products making misleading claims, including some falsely claiming to be certified.

**Sin of Worshiping False Labels:** A product, either through words, images, or marketing, gives the impression of third-party endorsement where no such endorsement exists.

### Providing Proof is Important

Before there were respected Green certification organizations such as EcoLogo, some manufacturers of environmentally friendly products "self-declared" their products to be Green, with limited or no evidence to back up their claims. Many did so genuinely believing their claims to be true, while

Many of the self-declared Green claims turned out to be false or misleading. When Green claims are misleading, it creates confusion among consumers and undermines the entire Green movement. Consumers might assume all environmental claims are misleading and, as a result, even the truly green products suffer. One of the ways to avoid the confusion is to focus on products certified by an independent third party such as EcoLogo. (See sidebar: Certification Organizations)

Although the process can vary, for a product to be Green certified, it must meet specific criteria and standards established by a Green certification organization. The standards as well can vary from group to group, but in many cases, they are relatively similar.

A product seeking certification must provide full ingredient disclosure (including the MSDS on each ingredient in the product), will likely have to work thru a variety of criteria hurdles, as well as meet performance, health and environmental tests where required by an accredited independent laboratory. If the data and tests indicate the product meets the required green criteria, the product is on its way to being certified. There may be other steps along the way, and it should be noted that Green certification is not forever. In most cases, the certification is for a set period and/or until the guidelines and criteria are changed.

### What Green Certification Does Not Mean

As the Green movement has taken hold, some facility managers have jumped on the Green bandwagon with the assumption that certified products are all fairly similar in cost and performance. However, this is not the case, and property managers should show due diligence in evaluating not only that all products used in their facility are indeed certified and

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Some Green cleaning products are not as cost-competitive as they may seem at first review, and when it comes to costs, property managers are advised to look beyond the ticket price. For instance, it is important to analyze their dilution, or mix-with-water, ratios to determine how cost effective the product is, as well as how effective it's performance. Needing to repeat a cleaning task increases cleaning costs because cleaning is so labor-intensive. These considerations often get overlooked in the selection process.

As to performance, while facility managers know that not all conventional cleaning products are created equal, they may not apply this thinking to Green products. For example, in one case, 25 environmentally certified floor care products were tested at a government office building to evaluate how they performed compared to their conventional counterparts. It was determined that at that time, only two met the required performance levels.

As facilities go Green, the first step is to select products certified Green by a reputable organization. The next step, as with any product, is to evaluate that product's at-use cost and performance. Fortunately, a competitive marketplace is forcing many manufacturers to make their Green offerings more cost-competitive and effective. And the final step is to always be on the lookout for new technologies and advances in Green cleaning products. Green cleaning is a journey, with new products and advances always evolving.

Source: Mike Sawchuk, Vice President and General Manager

Source: Mike Sawchuk, Vice President and General Manager of Enviro-Solutions and Charlotte Products, leading manufacturers of certified-Green cleaning chemicals based in Ontario, Canada. Mr. Sawchuk has been involved with the janitor industry for more than 15 years.



**Certification Organizations**

EcoLogo is just one of scores of Green certification organizations around the world. In addition to EcoLogo, based in Canada, other Green certification organizations include:

- GreenSeal®;
- Design for the Environment, which works under the umbrella of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.



**10 Steps to Creating a Green Cleaning Program**

1. Reach an Agreement: Decide specifically what, when, how, etc.
2. Build the Team: Make members stakeholders responsible to "get it done."
3. Conduct Baseline Surveys: Inventory existing cleaning chemicals, tools, and equipment; include appraisals of overall housekeeping quality, procedures, training, frequencies, and indoor air quality problems, complaint records, etc.
4. Develop a Plan: Set priorities, and determine what gets done when.
5. Get Everyone on Board: It's important to have all parties included in the process, and understand how and why things are being done.
6. Acquire Green Products and Equipment: This includes chemicals, entrance matting, vacuums, microfiber clothes, etc.
7. Training is Green Cleaning: Create an opportunity to learn the most effective and efficient procedures. This is best done in small groups.
8. Implement the Plan, Products, Procedures: It's important to get things done, not just spend time thinking and planning.
9. Take Responsibility: Once initiated, ensure all management and staff responsible for cleaning and the building occupants and visitors share in the responsibility of maintaining progress.
10. Communicate and Provide Feedback: Measure results, verify, document and communicate them to all to management and building users.