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Green means minimizing chemical use

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by Mike Sawchuk

It might seem a bit unusual for the vice president of a cleaning chemical manufacturing company to discuss minimizing chemical usage.



Master your chemical ratios and you'll be one step closer to green.

However, using only as much cleaning chemical to satisfactorily perform a cleaning task — even if it is an environmentally preferable product — is a very critical component of green cleaning.

Here are some tips on curtailing the amount of cleaning chemicals necessary to effectively complete different cleaning situations.

Floor care

The chemicals used in floor care, especially strippers, consist of some of the most powerful and potentially harmful of all traditional cleaning chemicals. Some studies indicate that the use of floor stripper can be reduced by as much as 50 percent by following these steps:

- Schedule floor work, such as stripping and refinishing, based on floor appearance and wear patterns rather than set calendar schedules.
- Dilute stripper with as much water as possible while still maintaining the product's effectiveness.
- Evenly apply diluted stripper to all floor surfaces, allowing enough time for the chemical to work efficiently, but not so much that the floor dries.

Toilet and urinal bowl cleaners

Many of the traditional products used to clean toilet bowls and urinals contain powerful acids, which are potentially harmful to cleaning workers, wastewater, streams and waterways.

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One way to reduce overusing these products is to have two types of toilet/urinal bowl cleaners: One for daily maintenance, and a strong, powerful acid only when necessary.

In many situations, the strong acid cleaner may only need to be used once or twice per month, depending on the facility's water condition, occupants and users.

Carpet care

Most carpet-cleaning professionals profess that the best way to remove a spot or stain in carpets is while it is still "fresh."

Depending on the type of stain, a fresh spot can oftentimes be removed by just using plain, cool water and blotting — eliminating the use of cleaning chemicals altogether.

And, because green cleaning often involves all the major stakeholders in a facility — managers, occupants, and cleaning professionals — it is a good idea to teach building occupants how to remove carpet stains as soon as they occur.

General cleaning

One of the best ways to reduce the amount of chemical used in general cleaning is by allowing chemicals to "dwell" on surfaces before wiping or rinsing.

Recently, I attended a cleaning seminar for custodial maintenance supervisors where the instructor asked how many of the attendees were familiar with the term "dwell time."

Surprisingly, several did not know that most cleaning chemicals, both green and traditional, need two to 10 minutes to dwell on surfaces in order to work effectively.

Allowing for sufficient dwell time reduces overall cleaning chemical usage.

Additionally, follow the manufacturer's recommendations regarding chemical dilution.

Too much chemical is not only wasteful, and potentially dangerous, but it can leave residue on surfaces defeating the entire cleaning process.

Following these steps can help minimize cleaning costs *and* protect the health of the cleaning worker, building occupants, and the environment.

Mike Sawchuk is vice president and general manager of Peterborough, Ontario-based Enviro-Solutions, a leading manufacturer of certified-green cleaning products.

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