Green Cleaning

What's in it for me?

Over the past few years, the jansan industry has been in the midst of what can only be termed "a quiet revolution." The use of Green or environmentally preferable cleaning chemicals, after decades of being advocated by such industry leaders as Stephen Ashkin, president of The Ashkin Group in Bloomington, IN, is now sweeping this industry.

Major chemical manufacturers, who had been reluctant to jump on board, are now increasingly embracing and manufacturing environmentally preferable cleaning products. This is partially due to two executive orders, in 1993 and 1998, authorizing the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products in all federally owned or operated offices around the world. It is also due to growing customer demand that facilities be cleaned with safer cleaning chemicals.

Additionally, it is the result of the creation and acceptance of the Green Seal® GS 37 certification program in the United States and its sister organization in Canada, Environmental Choice,™ which help manufacturers follow parameters that define and clarify what constitutes a Green cleaning product.

Distributors, also anxious to follow suit, are now adding Green cleaning chemicals to their product lines. For instance, Anthony Crisafulli of ATRA Janitorial Supply, in Pompton Plains, NJ, even refers to Green cleaning as "a sure door opener." Crisafulli, who sells certified Green cleaning chemicals manufactured by Enviro-Solutions, has been able to convert 25 different school districts to Green cleaning. "As well as win most all of their business just by talking about the merits of Green cleaning at our first meeting," he recalls.

Consequently, the building service contractor (BSC) is the last major industry segment to show a significant interest in environmentally preferable cleaning products and Green cleaning systems. The previously mentioned Washington, DC based Green Seal program will attempt to heighten interest at this level by introducing a Green Seal training and certification program, exclusively for BSCs. The program is planned to begin next year.

However, one revealing, non-scientific survey found that as many as 90 percent of BSCs had no intention of changing their cleaning systems nor indicated an interest in transferring to Green cleaning products. For the majority, the big question they were asking was, "Why change?"

Clarifying Green Cleaning And Its Benefits

Arthur Weisman, Green Seal, Inc.'s CEO, indicates he is not concerned with studies that find only 10 percent of BSCs are interested in using or adopting Green cleaning programs. "We have to keep in mind that Green Seal sets environmental leadership standards," he says. "And, we are trying to identify and promote the leaders in the industry first."

"Once BSCs have a better understanding of how some traditional cleaning chemicals can affect their own health and the health of their workers—as well as building occupants and the environment—they will probably take a more serious look at Green cleaning products," believes Mike Sawchuk, vice president of Enviro-Solutions. "Right now, there is still a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding."

Green cleaning chemicals, which are designed to reduce cleaning's impact on the environment and protect health, were first introduced to the consumer market in the early 1970s. Admittedly, these early offerings were costly, relatively ineffective

BY ROBERT KRAVITZ

compared to the popular cleaning products of the time, and few consumers— even fewer BSCs — purchased them. "I still find these issues [cost and effectiveness] to be the two big concerns among BSCs," says Sawchuk. "However, that is no longer the case."

Indeed, Green Seal and the Environmental Choice Program, assure BSCs that a Green cleaning chemical is as effective as a traditional cleaning product used for similar purposes and is 'cost neutral.' "So eliminating this misunderstanding and misconception is the first step in removing barriers to using certified Green cleaning chemicals for BSCs," Sawchuk says.

Furthermore, Sawchuk believes BSCs still need a better grasp of the *why's* of Green cleaning, such as why should they change from the traditional cleaning products that have served them well for years to environmentally preferable products? Among the other *why's*, he says are:

❊ Poor indoor air quality (IAQ), which can result from the volatile organic compounds (VOCs) found in some traditional cleaning products, can produce negative health effects ranging from headaches and dry eyes to nausea, dizziness, and fatigue.

❊ Studies indicate BSCs experience relatively high injury rates; many stem from the toxic chemicals found in cleaning products, particularly in floor and carpet maintenance products, disinfectants, and specialty cleaners.

❊ The dramatic rise in childhood asthma—as much as 160 percent since 1980—can be traced back to many of the powerful, traditional cleaning products used to clean schools.

Sawchuk adds that once BSCs adapt to the idea of cleaning for health first and appearance second, they can positively affect IAQ and their own health. "And, it is easy now to select certified Green cleaning products that reduce these risks to BSCs and the environment, while maintaining high-quality cleaning standards as well," he says.

Beyond Health Benefits

Most of us were taught that there is nothing more important than our health and few people doubt that most environmentally preferable cleaning products are healthier for their well being than most traditional products. However, BSCs have a business to run and may need more practical reasons for switching or diversifying into Green cleaning.

Richard Sanchez is a maintenance supervisor for Kaiser Permanente hospital, in Santa Rosa, CA, and owner of A J Janitorial, a relatively large building maintenance company in Northern California. He says that more and more of his customers are now inquiring and requesting the use of Green cleaning chemicals. "The bottom line is that I know my company would not have some of its customers if we did not use Green cleaning products," he says. "A few insist on it and many more prefer it."

Sanchez also believes that not only has he retained customers by adopting Green cleaning systems, but like the distributor mentioned earlier, he believes discussing Green when first meeting a prospect is proving to be a real "door opener" for him as well.

"When I submit a bid, I just don't present a list of services with a service charge," Sanchez says. "I talk about Green cleaning, the Green products we use, and why it is healthier for my workers and their employees as well. Possibly, because many know I also work in a hospital, they listen a bit more carefully when I discuss the benefits of Green cleaning."

Not only does Sanchez discuss the use of certified Green cleaning chemicals, but he also explains that a Green cleaning system involves using:

❊ **Microfiber mops and cloths**. "Because they usually require the use of less chemical and are more absorbent than traditional mops and cleaning cloths," he says.

❊ **Matting Systems.** "Entry matting systems help prevent dust and dirt from being tracked into the locations we clean, making our job easier and our customers' facilities cleaner."

❊ **HEPA vacuum cleaners.** "We use true-HEPA machines—vacuums that are totally sealed and use a HEPA filter— for better IAQ protection."

Market Reasons For Switching To Green Cleaning

❖ Intuitional managers from major corporations, such as banks, foundations, and property developers and managers are asking for certified Green cleaning systems.

❖ More facilities are seeking LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and LEED-EB certification; cleaning and the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products is a major component of this certification.

❖ Many federal, city, and state bodies are insisting that Green cleaning products be used in their facilities.

❖ School districts around the country, trying to address the growing problem of asthma, are requiring that Green cleaning products by used.

Arthur Weisman, CEO of Green Seal®, Inc.

Staying Ahead of the Game

In the 20-plus years Sanchez has been a BSC, he says he has never seen the industry as competitive as it is today. Sanchez says that some of his customers say they get one, two, sometimes a half-dozen calls a day from BSCs who want to submit a bid.

"The way I have decided to stay ahead of the game, beat out my competition and the low-bidders, is by offering quality cleaning and promoting the health benefits of Green cleaning," he says. "Working in a hospital, I see how many patients prefer to see a specialist when they are sick. I want my customers and my future customers to seek me out as their specialist when it comes to cleaning and someone who understands the value and importance of Green cleaning."

A Building Service Contractor Talks Green

In the past couple of years, our industry has been enamored with Green cleaning and the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products. However, most of the discussion and hullabaloo has been among manufacturers and distributors.

Do building service contractors (BSCs) share this enthusiasm? What do they say about the Green cleaning products they use?

An interview with one BSC, Nick Lazaris, vice president of Peace Maintenance, in Ottawa, Canada, may help shed some light on the questions.

Question: Nick, what kind of facilities does your company clean?
We have clients in both Canada and the United States. They are in the public, private, and institutional sectors and include utility companies, high-rise office buildings, and a major university.

When and why did you first start using Green cleaning products?
We first started using Green cleaning products in 2000, because we felt, as a cleaning contractor, it was our responsibility to help protect the environment and the health of the occupants of our clients' facilities.

We also are always looking for new ways to improve our quality of service, and we have found using Green cleaning helps us do this.

Have your customers inquired about Green cleaning products?
Although hardly any clients inquired about environmentally preferable cleaning products a few years ago, today a significant number actually *require* us to use Green products. Concerns about indoor air quality, asthma, allergies, and similar types of ailments along with concerns about the environment have fostered this. In addition, more of our customers are aware that effective, certified Green cleaning products are now available.

What do you mean by *certified* Green cleaning products?
Until recently, we were never certain if a product was Green. Tom McArthur, director of Technical Services at Enviro-Solutions, a manufacturer of Green cleaning products, taught us that Green Seal® in the United States and The Environmental Choice Program™ in Canada test and certify products as environmentally preferable. Certification also means they are proven as effective as traditional cleaning products and cost competitive.

Do you feel switching to Green has helped your company?
Absolutely. Our customers see us as a much more professional organization, concerned not only about appearance but also about the well-being of our clients, their facilities, and the environment.

Do you believe Green cleaning products are the future of the industry?
Yes. Some of the larger and more astute BSCs are already offering Green cleaning for customers that request it, and some offer it exclusively.

Not only is Green cleaning the future, but as an industry, I believe we have an obligation to improve the products and services we provide our customer, when, where, and however we can. Using Green cleaning products is definitely a major step in this direction.

Robert Kravitz is a former building service contractor and now a writer and communications professional for the cleaning and building industries.

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