

Question: Why are Paper Products Part of a Green Cleaning System?

Green cleaning, as has been discussed previously, refers to much more than just cleaning chemicals. It involves all types of cleaning products and equipment. And it also includes paper products.

There are many reasons that cleaning professionals, as well as building owners and managers, should transfer from conventional to environmentally preferable paper products. The first is black and white: we are cutting down more trees around the world than we can replace.

According to Stephen Ashkin, a leading Green Cleaning advocate, in the United States alone more than 4.5 billion pounds of paper are used each year in commercial and institutional buildings. This requires the cutting down of more than 50 million trees—a huge number to serve the needs of just one country. Green paper products, on the other hand, are made from at least 30 percent post-consumer recycled paper, which helps reduce the number of trees that must be destroyed for paper.

There are also many other reasons why a Green cleaning program must include Green paper products. The manufacturing processes that go into making paper require the use of several products found to be harmful to the environment. One of the worst offenders is chlorine bleach. Although bleach has served our industry well and has many helpful uses, it can also be carcinogenic and is one of the most deadly manufactured substances on earth. Another ingredient used to make conventional paper is dioxin, a probable human carcinogen.

Bleach is used not only to whiten paper products but also to help make them much softer to the touch, a feature most consumers like. Fortunately, new manufacturing procedures and chemicals can be substituted for bleach, such as hydrogen peroxide, which make them much safer for manufacturers produce as well as protect the environment.

Green paper products were initially more expensive than conventional paper products. One reason for this is that the paper used for environmentally preferable products must come from recycled paper, which adds to the cost. Plus, the new technologies and manufacturing processes, as referenced earlier, had to be developed to make Green paper possible. However, as with most environmentally preferable cleaning products, the additional costs have gone down and Green paper products are now competitively priced.

Today, Green paper is used throughout North America. We find several states in the United States that now require the use of Green or at least chlorine-free paper. For example, Vermont has been using environmentally friendly paper products for more than 10 years.

And a growing number of federal agencies, led by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, are also selecting Green or chlorine-free paper. Not to be overlooked, Oakland and San Francisco, California, and Portland, Oregon, are also buying chlorine-free paper, and Minnesota and Indiana both promote its use to state agencies.

How Can You Tell It's Green?

Most Green paper products are now so similar to conventional products that it is no longer easy to tell them apart, either by touch or by visual inspection. Fortunately,

selecting them is very easy. Both EcoLogo^M and Green Seal[®] now certify environmentally preferable products. If the product bears either of these organizations' labels it means your homework has been done—the paper is Green.