

Is Day Cleaning Green Cleaning?



BY STEPHEN ASHKIN*

Recently some in the professional cleaning industry have reported a link between green cleaning and day cleaning. This link was most likely established since more and more facilities that are implementing day cleaning programs are also commonly using green cleaning products and procedures. Now, the obvious question: "Is day cleaning green cleaning?" The answer is no. The goal of green cleaning is to protect health without harming the environment. A facility that is cleaned during the day is not necessarily green, especially if conventional cleaning products, tools, and equipment are employed that can potentially harm human health and the environment. Further, there are times when day cleaning is not necessarily the healthiest and most efficient way to clean. Many facilities using a day cleaning system have employees that adopt a 'wave by' habit in which office workers wave cleaning workers away, signaling not to clean their areas at that time. This scenario often surfaces when an office employee is on an important phone call, for instance. In these cases, it is assumed that the area can be cleaned at

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a later time or the next day, causing no serious problems. However, all too often, wave bys become a daily routine for large numbers of office workers. When this happens, many areas of the facility may not be cleaned and dust, soils, and contaminants may build up, impacting not just the immediate wave by areas, but the entire work space as well. This is often a cause of poor indoor air quality. The solution is not necessarily to abandon day cleaning, which does have its benefits as will be discussed later. Simply, facility managers should limit the number of wave bys allowed in a facility. This is a good opportunity for facility managers to help building users understand the important role that cleaning professionals perform in keeping facilities not only looking good, but healthy as well.

Is Day Cleaning Sustainable Cleaning?

Having answered our first question about the day cleaning/green cleaning connection, some cleaning contractors may ask, "Is day cleaning sustainable cleaning? For this, the answer is a qualified yes. There are several reasons. For example, at the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) headquarters in Denver, CO (US), where a day cleaning regimen is in place, the building is powered from about 8 am to 5 pm. During this time, cleaning is performed while staffers are at work. However, at 5 pm, the facility is 'put to bed'. Most lighting is turned off and HVAC and other mechanical systems are turned down. The building is essentially 'turned off' for 10 hours per day, more than 40 percent of the day. The result is energy savings of more than US\$250,000 (US), which is the equivalent of US\$0.80 per square foot. But this also means less fuel is necessary to power the building and fewer greenhouse gasses are emitted. Both factors protect the environment and make the facility considerably more sustainable.

And, if green cleaning products are employed in day cleaning, sustainability is elevated another notch or two. This is because green cleaning chemicals are made from renewable resources, helping to promote sustainability. Often, green cleaning chemicals are heavily concentrated, used with auto-dispensers, and even delivered in multi-gallon containers. All of these components help make the chemical last longer, reducing transport needs and packaging. This saves paper and fuel...again helping to promote sustainability.

So, is a building that is cleaned during the day using green cleaning products the greenest and most sustainable way to clean a facility? The combination certainly does have its benefits. As environmental issues continue to grow and concerns about sustainability spread, I predict that more facilities throughout Australia and Asia will adopt similar day cleaning and green cleaning hybrid programs.

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