

green cleaning



By **STEPHEN ASHKIN**, President, The Ashkin Group

O.K. It's **Green**... But **What's** **Inside**

Canadian building service contractors and facility managers really do deserve a pat on the back. A few years ago, so many took a leadership role in the transfer and adoption of Green cleaning product that it is truly humbling. In some cases, they were far ahead of their peers in the United States and Western Europe.

The big turning point, of course, was the development and recognition of independent, third-party certification programs such as those developed by Canada's EcoLogo program.

Certification took the guesswork out of selecting an environmentally preferable cleaning product. If it was certified by EcoLogo, end users could rest assured the product had met stringent criteria and guidelines ensuring that it was safer for users with considerably less impact on the environment when compared to conventional products used for the same purposes.

Today, however, end users want to know more about the cleaning chemicals they are using, Green or not. They want to know, and rightfully so, exactly what ingredients these products contain. This is referred to as "ingredient disclosure" and appears to be one of the next big milestones that the cleaning industry is going to be asked to address on its ever-forward-moving Green journey.

WHY DISCLOSURE IS NECESSARY

Some end users might ask why this is necessary. After all, if the product has already been certified Green by EcoLogo or some other leading and respected certification body, isn't that enough?

A few years ago, we might have answered yes, simply because Green certification programs were considered such a milestone for the industry. However, certification is no longer enough. Educated consumers are now demanding transparency so that they can make their own assessments. Some of their reasons include the following:

- To identify products and their ingredients that might meet a specific need, such as protecting small children in schools or day-care centres.
- To recognize products and their ingredients that are safe for pregnant women or building

users with specific health concerns such as asthma.

- To note products and their ingredients that might not be safe, or on the other end of the scale, are preferable in medical facilities, long-term care locations and other sensitive areas.

Some who oppose additional ingredient disclosure programs argue that much of this information is already available on material safety data sheets (MSDS), which are widely used throughout North America and many areas of the world. However, the purpose of an MSDS is not to disclose all ingredients but instead, *only hazardous ingredients above one per cent and carcinogens above one-tenth of one per cent.*

This means that ingredients that fall below these thresholds are not required to be reported. Nor is disclosure information required about ingredients that are not, as least at the present time, considered hazardous.

While MSDS was a very good start and definitely a step in the right direction, it really does provide little insight into a product's overall impact on the environment. This is because the purpose of the MSDS is actually to focus on protecting the health and safety of the worker. Full disclosure will take this a step further by encouraging manufacturers to go beyond the minimum requirements of the MSDS and even third-party certification programs.

WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY

This all seems simple enough and easily done, so why is there a hesitancy among chemical manufacturers in the industry to adopt a full ingredient disclosure program? The answer is confidential-

