

Scientific Proof?

Expanding the Concept of Green and Sustainable Cleaning

By JOHN RICHTER

Green cleaning has many facets. At one time, it simply involved using chemicals that claimed to have a reduced impact on the environment. Now users want scientific proof that all the products they use, not just cleaning chemicals, are safer for the user, building occupants, and the environment.

A new aspect of Green cleaning is also evolving: sustainability and, more specifically, sustainable cleaning processes. This expands Green cleaning beyond chemicals and equipment to include factors such as cleaning results and productivity.

To better understand this evolving concept, the definitions below may prove

helpful:

Effective: Using cleaning tools and systems that are scientifically proven to be effective (both appearing clean and scientifically proven to be clean and healthy.)

Effective and economical: Using cleaning tools and systems that maintain their efficacy throughout the cleaning process or several processes, reducing labor and chemical costs and waste as well as minimizing the spread of soils, enhancing economic sustainability.

Environmentally sustainable: Using cleaning tools and processes that protect natural resources, allowing us to replen-



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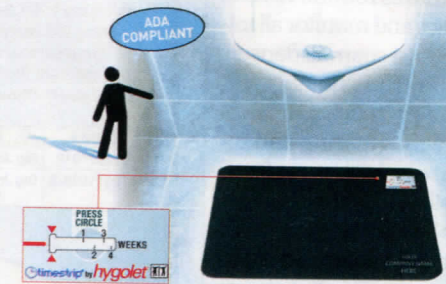
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sustainability.

With the flat-surface cleaning system, the microfiber pad lasted far longer than microfiber cloths, and cleaning effectiveness remained consistent. Clearly, the flat-surface cleaning method is healthier and best meets the broader concept of Green and sustainable cleaning.

More Sustainable Tile and Grout Cleaning

In a similar test that focused on the removal of soils and bacteria from grout lines, microfiber flat mops were tested against a spray-and-vac cleaning method. A spray-and-vac system combines automatic chemical metering and injection, an indoor pressure washer, and a wet vacuum into a single integrated system to remove moisture, solution, and contaminants after cleaning.

For this test, researchers artificially soiled floors with a solution rich in bacteria. The floors were then split into sections that were tested separately for bacteria levels. Certain areas were cleaned using microfiber flat mops with cleaning agents and the others using the spray-and-vac system. The floors were

tested again to determine bacteria levels after cleaning.

This test revealed that the flat-mop system left 15 to 50 times more bacteria in the grout areas when compared to the spray-and-vac (aka no-touch cleaning) system.

The only way to level the playing field for the flat-mop system was to replace soiled microfiber pads and, again, frequently launder them—promoting the same unsustainable results as with the microfiber cloths discussed earlier. This was not the case using the spray-and-vac method, making it a more sustainable cleaning process.

Water-Only Cleaning

Often, the ultimate in Green, sustainable cleaning does not require any cleaning chemicals at all. In the grout cleaning test, for example, water-only cleaning proved surprisingly effective using both the flat-mop and the spray-and-vac systems.

According to ATP testing, the key difference was that the flat-mop scores indicated a 50 to 60 percent reduction in ATP levels, while the spray-and-vac

method indicated as much as a 98 percent reduction.

Visual appearance was also noted during the study, and although the floors differed in level of bacterial contamination, their appearance was nearly identical. Without proper ATP testing, this can lead to false conclusions regarding the cleanliness and sanitary state of surfaces. In other words, they may look clean and smell clean but not actually be clean.

Green cleaning, sustainability, and a healthy bottom line for jan-san professionals are all interconnected. In the 21st Century, cleaning tools, systems, and solutions must protect the environment, enhance sustainability, and prove economically beneficial for the user. At the same time, they must deliver on our industry's goal of providing a clean and healthy environment for building users. □

John Richter is technical director for Kaivac, Inc., developers of the No-Touch Cleaning System. He has a master's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Dayton with an emphasis on thermal sciences and fluid dynamics.

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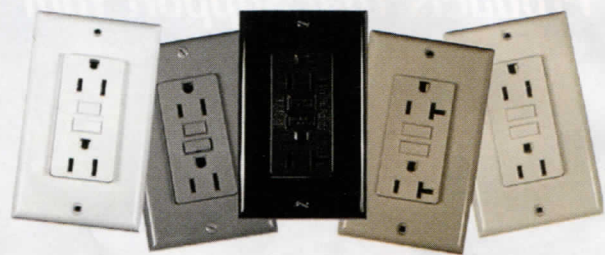
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