

Will you face an 'ecology cop'?



The future may bring more awareness among your customers. Be prepared.

By **Robert Kravitz**

Stephen Ashkin, president of The Ashkin Group and founder/executive director of the Green Cleaning Network, is considered by many to be the father of green cleaning.

Recently, he released his "Green Predictions for 2009."

Along with forecasting that the performance of green cleaning products will improve and their costs will continue to fall, he believes green cleaning will take on a broader meaning: The definitions of the words *green* and *sustainable* will merge, and being a more sustainable company will be of greater concern to customers and prove to be a differentiator in the marketplace.

By "sustainable," Ashkin is referring to the use of natural resources in such a way that they are not sacrificed for future generations.

On the horizon

He states that as our customers become more concerned about sustainability, many may actually become "ecology cops," making sure all the vendors they work with are green and environmentally focused.

This means that carpet cleaning technicians will need to not only offer more environmentally responsible carpet cleaning services to their customers, but also find ways to make their own business operations greener, healthier and more sustainable.

This may involve just about every aspect of their business, from:

- How to operate vehicles and buildings to reduce energy consumption
- Fuels and water used in the carpet cleaning process
- Sustainable office practices including the purchase of recycled or environmentally preferable office products, removal of waste and recycling
- The carpet cleaners' recommendations to their clients including cleaning processes and frequencies suggested
- The equipment and chemicals selected and used, and ultimately how they are disposed

"For some cleaning technicians, this may mean that

they have to make a number of key changes in their business operations," says Ashkin. "But in the long run, these will likely be best for their business, including helping [them] market their business, and prove to be the most cost-effective way to operate their companies as well."

And Ashkin adds that when we eliminate waste or learn to conserve resources like fuel, energy and water, it all saves money. In many respects, waste is money and the more we save, the more we profit.

Priority cleaning

Already, in many areas of the United States, cleaning professionals decide which geographic areas they will service and when.

Originally, many technicians did this because driving from one area to another was too time-consuming.

However, Ashkin believes that because of the cost of fuel, which is expected to rise again, and in the interest of sustainability and protecting the environment, more technicians will service only *specific* areas and, further, they will segment those areas so that only certain areas are serviced on specific days.

He also believes technicians will advise their commercial clients to concentrate on cleaning carpet in the more heavily soiled areas of their facilities instead of the "most important" areas.

"Many businesses have frequent carpet cleaning schedules for executive offices, even though these carpets usually do not get that soiled," says Ashkin. "They should establish priority cleaning systems, putting greater emphasis on [cleaning] carpets in and around high-use sections of the building and entry areas. Keeping these areas clean helps keep the rest of the facility clean and healthy."

Reducing driving times will help control costs. Working out carpet cleaning schedules based on need instead of executive privilege is more cost effective for the customer and is more sustainable and environmentally



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responsible. “It will also help strengthen the bond between the carpet cleaning technician and the client,” according to Ashkin.

More environmentally responsible equipment

How can a carpet cleaning company select more sustainable equipment? There are several ways, according to Wayne Boone, director of sales for HydraMaster, a manufacturer of truckmount carpet cleaning equipment.

Among his suggestions for truckmount machines:

- **Product replacement:** Replace machines that are more than five years old with newer systems; newer equipment tends to be much more sensitive to the environment.
- **Air quality protection:** Traditional truckmounts burn gas, diesel or kerosene in order to power the system and heat the water. Running at a high RPM, the amount of exhaust created can be substantial and can significantly affect air quality. However, newer systems have more elaborate emission-control systems in place, and some use a clutch drive system so the host vehicle can power the extractor, releasing very little pollution.
- **Reduced fuel consumption:** Older truckmounts can be fuel hogs, using more than two gallons of gas per hour. Newer systems are more fuel-efficient.
- **Fewer components:** Newer truckmount systems have fewer parts and components than older models. This usually means they operate more efficiently and require less maintenance and downtime. Truckmounts using the vehicle host for power have even fewer parts and components.
- **Additional features:** Many truckmounts use heat exchange technology instead of burning fuel, and this means additional savings. For systems powered by the host vehicle, the heat generated from the host vehicle is used to heat the cleaning solution, which can also be a fuel and maintenance cost saver.

- **Quiet:** Some truckmounts can operate with all vehicle doors closed, reducing noise pollution. While a simple step, it lessens the impact of the machine on the surrounding neighborhood.

A portable extractor can also be more environmentally responsible, especially in its use of water. More advanced machines use less than a gallon of water per minute, according to Danna Adams, a technical support manager for U.S. Products, a manufacturer of professional carpet cleaning and restoration equipment.

“This is several times less than older machines, and in areas of the country where water supplies are tight, this is a critical issue for customers,” he says.

Saying it loud and clear

Ashkin suggests that carpet cleaners who have made their companies more sustainable make sure this message is conveyed to current as well as prospective customers.

“This is not anything you want to keep to yourself,” he says. “Some contractors have revamped their entire marketing message to promote that they are green and sustainable. These are the contractors that will be ahead of the pack as this becomes an even more important issue.”

As more of our customers become ecology cops, companies that are green and sustainable in their offerings to customers — as well as their business operations — will be more likely to hold onto the customers they have and be better able to recruit new ones.

In addition to being beneficial to the environment and people’s health, this also makes a positive difference to the bottom line of these companies. [CM](#)

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