



Sustainable Growth:

How the Jansan Industry Can Benefit From the 'New Green'

By Stephen Ashkin

Although I would like to believe that the professional cleaning industry and all industries are moving in a greener, more environmentally responsible, and more sustainable direction because of concerns about our planet, I am too pragmatic for that. Sure, I estimate that the majority of those in industry are concerned about environmental/sustainability issues and want to become better stewards by protecting our world and resources for future generations. But for the most part, the driving force for becoming more environmentally responsible and sustainable, especially with the current struggling economy, is far more practical. It has become a bread-and-butter issue.

If being greener and more sustainable in today's

economy can help a cleaning contractor, jansan distributor, manufacturer, or other entity cut costs, improve worker productivity, and enhance overall operating efficiency, then most will believe it is worth investigating. Fortunately, we are now learning that operating in a greener more sustainable manner can generate these savings and benefits.

Terminology and Evolution

Before digging deeper into these issues, we need to understand some terms and what has evolved in the green/sustainable world.

Green Cleaning is simply defined as "cleaning to protect health without harming the environment." More broadly and practically speaking, it means using cleaning tools, chemicals, equipment, and other products that have a reduced negative impact on the environment, the user, and building occupants.

We should also be aware that green cleaning now involves more than just using products that are more protective of the environment. It also means using products that help promote sustainability. This can be from the way the product is made—using natural and renewable resources—to the way it is pack-

aged—using recycled materials and larger containers to reduce the amount of paper and plastic necessary for packaging—as well as the fuel used for transportation.

While the goal of being sustainable involves using less paper, water, and fuel and few, if any, natural resources and materials, a better understanding is needed of the broader depth of the word.

It is believed the word *sustainable* was coined by European foresters about 200 years ago. At that time, wood was used for just about everything from fuel to home and factory construction, and foresters were concerned about how fast large areas of the continent were becoming deforested.

In response, foresters developed what they referred to as scientific or sustainable forestry. The concept was that if enough new trees were planted to stay a step or two ahead of what was cut down, this most precious resource would remain plentiful.

Skipping forward to 1987, the Brundtland Commission, formerly the U.N. World Commission on the Environment and Development, officially defined the word *sustainable*, and the definition is now honored around the globe. According to their definition, sustainable means using natural resources in such a way

that “they meet the needs of today’s generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

So, in green/sustainable terminology, *green* refers to a product; *sustainable* refers to a company and how it is operated.

In addition, for many companies, sustainable actions must be tied to cost savings. Therefore, owners and managers must readily identify how being sustainable impacts the triple bottom line, which is a term coined by John Elkington in 1994. Elkington suggested that a green, sustainable company or facility was focused on these “three Ps”: profits, people (protecting the health and welfare of those working in the facility as well as the local community), and planet (protecting the health of the earth and its natural resources).

Proving That Savings Are Possible

The improved economics of going green and becoming more sustainable is a major motivating factor. When green cleaning first swept the professional cleaning industry, proponents believed that significant monetary benefits would materialize. But it took a number of years before substantive studies concluded this to be true. These days we are analyzing sustainability. Several studies now indicate that cost savings—sometimes significant ones—are possible when sustainable operations are in place. For instance,

consider the following examples:

Several years ago, the California Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) spent approximately US\$500,000 to make one of its Sacramento, CA, buildings more environmentally responsible and sustainable. Steps taken included planting native, drought-resistant grasses and plants well as installing low-flow toilets, water-free urinals, and water-efficient fixtures. These measures have decreased water use by as much as 50 percent. And simply expanding entryway cleaning systems and procedures to prevent soils from entering the facility has saved nearly \$10,000 per year. Altogether, the agency estimates saving more than \$600,000 annually as a result of these sustainability measures, and the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) believes the building’s value has increased by more than \$10 million as well.

In 2001, Adobe Systems invested \$650,000 to make two of its San Jose, CA, locations greener and more sustainable. As of 2007, these steps have saved Adobe more than \$725,000.

Applications for the Professional Cleaning Industry

One of the first ways janitors, manufacturers, distributors, and contract cleaners can do their part to be sustainable is to find a way to measure the amounts of energy, water, and resources they use to run their businesses. This provides an initial benchmark, and

How would you like to make **\$199** in **15 minutes?**

Just fill out the SM/ISSA 2010 Distribution Sales Survey.

Soon you will receive a survey regarding your 2010 product sales. Please set 15 minutes aside to complete the survey. The results will be used to present a report that is representative of the industry at large. Plus, all distributors who complete the survey receive a FREE Copy of the report. (A \$199 value.)

Watch for your survey coming soon.

**SANITARY
MAINTENANCE**

ISSA
INTERNATIONAL
SANITARY SERVICE ASSOCIATION



many companies now use online “dashboard” computer systems to collect and analyze this information.

Users enter information regarding how much electricity, fuel, water, and other resources are being used. The information allows the system to establish a benchmark and to track ongoing usage. Therefore, managers know exactly when, where, and how these resources are used in their businesses’ operations and the potential impact on the environment. Some dashboards go a step further and offer suggestions on where these environmental impacts can be reduced and cost savings realized.

For distributors and contract cleaners, a simple yet often overlooked way to reduce fuel usage is to make adjustments in delivery and service routes. Servicing end customers in a specific area of a community on certain days can significantly reduce driving times and fuel needs. Because making deliveries can be so costly and fuel-demanding, some suppliers require large-quantity orders from their customers and are even considering adopting what are commonly known as “no left turn delivery programs” in which delivery routes are planned to eliminate left turns that waste fuel and money as drivers wait for traffic to clear at major intersections.

Some steps cleaning contractors specifically can undertake to become more sustainable include these:

- Use green cleaning chemicals. These are made of renewable resources and are packaged in recycled and recyclable materials.
- Develop fair and equitable employment practices. These practices, along with proper training, are the “people” component of sustainability mentioned earlier. A benefit to contractors is that they help reduce turnover and absenteeism, resulting in a major cost savings.
- Process all product orders and requests using online services to reduce the need for paper.
- Update cleaning equipment. Newer equipment is usually more energy and water efficient than are older machines.
- Employ more interim cleaning methods. This applies mostly to floor and carpet care; properly performed, interim cleaning methods can reduce frequency of floor refinishing/ carpet restoration, which helps save energy, water, and chemical.
- Use low-flow equipment. Many extractors and some floor machines are designed with more advanced low-flow technologies that use less water and chemical compared to older machines.
- Properly maintain cleaning equipment.
- Incorporate some type of reporting/measuring system to analyze green and sustainable business operations. It is true: we cannot manage what we cannot measure.

The Other Sustainability Push

I started this article by discussing the true driving force behind operating a business or facility in a greener and more sustainable manner: cost savings. Another push that we see gaining momentum today is major organizations requesting that their vendors and suppliers also prove they are taking steps to operate in a more environmentally responsible and sustainable manner.

An example of this is Wal-Mart, which requires many of its suppliers to implement and report how they are becoming more sustainable. Why? Because Wal-Mart knows that this will result in greater operating efficiency, which translates into cost savings that can be passed on throughout the supply chain. And don’t forget that becoming more sustainable also can be used as a marketing tool. It tells prospective customers that your company is efficiently operated and that this efficiency may result in lower costs, more satisfactory performance, and, in turn, greater customer loyalty.

Finally, being sustainable just makes sense and is the right thing to do to protect our planet, our natural resources, and our children. ☐



Steve Ashkin is president of Sustainability Tool, LLC and The Ashkin Group, a consulting firm specializing in greening the cleaning industry. He can be reached at steveashkin@ashkingroup.com.

MVP ISSA INTERCLEAN Show Special!!
EXCLUSIVE...

Enviro-MAX

Vacuum Bags

Now thru November 30th, SAVE

10% OFF

On stocked vac bags only when you mention this ad code: **ISSA-BAGS**

DARE TO COMPARE!

Ask About The MVP Nov. Brush Sale!

- Free Freight on 20 Cases
- Same Day Shipping
- Late 5:00 PM (ET) Cut Off
- No Minimum To Meet
- OEM Quality Bags & Parts
- Wholesale Only

ISSA MEMBER
The Experts in Training and Maintenance

1.800.870.0687
Fax: 616.406.3125
Order on the web!
www.mor-value.com

MVP
MOR-VALUE® PARTS CO.

At MVP, You're the Most Valuable Person!