

Guest Columnist

Turning Hospital Floors Green

By

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(HealthNewsDigest.com) - More and more medical facilities are getting on the Green bandwagon, especially in regards to cleaning. The process can move surprisingly easily ... until it comes to floors. Greening hard-surface floors in a hospital is a problem for several reasons. First, many hospitals and other medical facilities have acres and acres of hard-surface floors. An office building, for instance, may have a fairly even mix of hard-surface and soft-surface (carpeted) floors, yet medical facilities tend to weigh very heavily toward tile, linoleum, and the like. The next big issue is that many Green floor-

care chemicals – detergents, polishes, strippers, and finishes – have not yet met the performance standards of conventional chemicals. For instance, in one situation, the high-gloss shine one medical facility wanted disappeared in weeks even with proper maintenance. In the past, using conventional finishes, the shine would last for months. In another case, the environmentally preferable finish applied to a floor reacted with the copper-colored electrical outlets installed in the floors and along baseboards, discoloring them. There is not much we can do about the amount of hard-surface floors in medical facilities. But there are possibilities available for using more environmentally preferable and responsible floor-care chemicals. The products do exist and many are proving to work as good as, if not better than, conventional chemicals. Why Green Floor Care? Although they have served us well for many years, many of the ingredients found in floor-care chemicals are some of the most powerful and potentially harmful in the entire cleaning industry to building occupants and the environment. Some of these ingredients include: \* Carcinogens; \* Endocrine disruptors; \* High levels of VOCs (volatile organic compounds); \* Ethylene glycol methyl ether (EGME), which can cause birth defects and damage reproductive organs; \* Skin, eye, and respiratory irritants; and \* Zinc, found in finishes, which can be toxic to aquatic life. Problems surface using these chemicals when they are first applied to the floor and once again when they are being removed. In both cases, the ingredients can become airborne, touched, or washed down drains, impacting the health of building occupants and waterways. In fact, some states have banned washing floor-care chemicals and solutions down drains entirely. How to Select Greener Floor Chemicals Selecting Green floor-care chemicals may involve some trial and error. However, there are ways to make the process simpler and faster. The first and most crucial step is to select a janitorial distributor familiar with Green floor-care products for a medical facility. A distributor well versed on Green cleaning and Green floor care quickly becomes a walking encyclopedia when it comes to transferring from conventional products to those that are environmentally preferable. Next, and your astute Green distributor will likely agree with this, select only those products that have been certified by an honored certification organization. Medical facilities, because of their size and scope and because they are designed for people dealing with health challenges, are not the proper locations to test a product that has not already been independently evaluated and proven to have a reduced impact on users, building

occupants, and the environment. Finally, different brands will need to be tested and evaluated. What often works well is to have a “cleaning challenge.” Using chemicals manufactured by one company in one area of the facility and those made by another in a different section. After several weeks or several months, compare notes: Which products were easiest to apply? Which have performed the best? Which were easiest to remove? Were there any strange consequences (odors, chemical reactions as referenced earlier)? Although several product lines may need to be tested, invariably one product line will prove to be the most effective. Also, it is often best to select all the products from the same company because many manufacturers design floor-care chemicals to work together, like a system.

**The Equipment Component** Many administrators mistakenly believe Green is all about chemicals. However, the equipment used is almost as important. In fact, in some cases, for instance in a facility seeking Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) certification, it can make or break a Green cleaning program. So what makes a floor machine Green? When selecting an auto scrubber, administrators are urged to look for these features:

- \* **Quiet equipment:** LEED standards require the equipment to operate at a low noise level.
- \* **Low moisture:** A low moisture scrubber typically has an advanced squeegee and vacuum system so that chemicals, solution, and contaminants are thoroughly and quickly recovered. This also allows floors to dry quickly, helping to promote safety.
- \* **Less chemical and water:** Most scrubbers use less chemical and water than manually cleaning floors; however, Greener scrubbers take this a step further. The less chemical and water used, the less impact on the environment.
- \* **Maintenance-free gel batteries:** Conventional batteries can be dangerous to work with. Maintenance-free batteries require little or no maintenance and are much more environmentally responsible.

The Green Journey Begins Greening floor care with the proper chemicals and equipment is doable. However, medical facility administrators should view all Green cleaning programs, including Green floor care, as a journey. Over time, new technologies, products, equipment, and procedures may be introduced that raise the standards, improving the look and safety of floors, with ever greater protection of the environment. Gary Pelphrey is general manager of [www.Powr-Flite.com](http://www.Powr-Flite.com), a leading manufacturer of professional floor care equipment. Subscribe to our FREE Ezine and receive current Health News, be eligible for discounted products/services and coupons related to your Health. We publish 24/7. [HealthNewsDigest.com](http://HealthNewsDigest.com) For advertising/promotion, email: [tvmike13@healthnewsdigest.com](mailto:tvmike13@healthnewsdigest.com) Or call toll free: 877- 634-9180

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