

# **Green Carpet Care: The Nuts and Bolts**

by Stephen Ashkin

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*Green cleaners use  
Green chemicals and  
equipment*

If there is one thing I know about carpet cleaning technicians, it is that they believe time is money. So let's get to it.

What is "Green Cleaning"? The goal of Green Cleaning is to clean effectively while protecting health and avoiding any harm to the environment. As to Green carpet cleaning specifically, the goal is to integrate and employ systems, products, and procedures that effectively clean carpets while also protecting the health of the cleaning technician and building occupants and have no or minimal impact on the environment.

Green carpet cleaning opens up scores of business and marketing opportunities for cleaning businesses. This has been demonstrated time and again with other segments of the cleaning industry.

This is not something to keep quiet about. If your company offers Green carpet cleaning, spread the word. More and more customers, commercial and residential, want their facilities cleaned Green. We are now seeing this written into RFPs (requests for proposals) by major private and public organizations, and this will become even more commonplace in years to come.

So what makes a carpet cleaning technician or company Green?

## **Green Carpet Cleaners Educate Commercial Customers**

We must educate and encourage our clients to prioritize their carpet cleaning needs, placing greater emphasis on those areas that are used the most and have the worst soiling. Facility managers often want executive offices, conference rooms, and similar areas cleaned more frequently than other areas of the building that see heavier use.

Why is this a problem? The concern is that although executive areas are occupied by key members of the organization, they are typically the least soiled area of a facility – meaning they do not need to be cleaned as frequently as more high-traffic areas.

## **Green Cleaners Use Green Cleaning Chemicals**

Carpet cleaning's impact on the environment has been greatly reduced since technicians began pre-spraying carpets instead of mixing chemicals and water in their extractor solution tanks. This method allows less chemical to be used, which always makes cleaning Greener and healthier. Also, this method allows technicians to apply chemical to the areas where it is needed most.

Further, scores of manufacturers now make chemicals that have been certified Green by leading certification organizations and/or meet or exceed their criteria. These chemicals contain safer and more sustainable ingredients and fewer VOCs (volatile organic compounds). Many technicians find these chemicals to be as good as – and in many cases even more effective than – the conventional chemicals they have used before.

### **Green Cleaners Replace Outdated Equipment**

Many carpet cleaning technicians have delayed selecting new extractors and other cleaning tools and equipment due to the uncertain economy. However, studies indicate that the U.S. economy is picking up and businesses now feel more comfortable replacing older machines.

Extractors that are more than 5 years old should be replaced with newer systems, preferably systems that have been independently tested and evaluated by the Carpet and Rug Institute and have earned a Seal of Approval rating. Most of these systems have been reengineered to meet healthier cleaning standards and have a reduced impact on the environment.

Additionally, manufacturers are now introducing carpet extractors that use no chemical whatsoever. The jury is still out as to the performance and effectiveness of these machines; however, at this time, they do appear promising.

These machines not only eliminate the use of chemical entirely, but they also eliminate the boxes, packaging, and transportation needed for those chemicals – making them even more environmentally responsible.

### **Green Cleaners Employ Interim Cleaning Methods**

Along with more frequent and effective vacuuming, interim cleaning methods include employing dry carpet cleaning systems, shampoo, and even bonnet systems that tend to use less water, energy, and chemical than more thorough restorative measures.

This also helps delay restorative cleaning, all of which minimizes carpet cleaning's

impact on the environment.



### **Green Cleaners Use Low-Flow Technology**

Conventional carpet cleaning equipment uses as much as two gallons of water per minute. Low-flow or low-moisture machines can cut this amount in half. Not only do they use

less water – a natural resource that we must use more responsibly – but they let carpets dry faster, minimizing the possibility that mold or mildew will develop.

To qualify as low-moisture, a machine must allow carpets to dry in two to four hours, depending on various facility and environmental factors.

### **Green Cleaners Use Cold Water When Possible**

This is somewhat controversial, but depending on the type and degree of soiling, there are eco-friendly cleaning chemicals available that can clean effectively using cold water. The heating of water for cleaning – and, specifically, carpet cleaning – can have the single most negative impact of any cleaning task on the environment because of the large amounts of energy required to do so. Using chemicals that work effectively in cold water helps eliminate this problem.

Green cleaners maintain their equipment properly. It is important to make sure that all the equipment used for cleaning carpets, from trucks and vans for transport to the actual machines, is in proper working order. Doing so ensures that machines use less fuel or electricity, helping to protect the environment, and that they last longer and operate more efficiently, both of which provide a cost savings.

### **Green Cleaners Use Quiet Equipment**

Green equipment is designed to protect the health of the cleaning worker and, in so doing, help improve their morale and productivity – and this includes protecting workers from noise pollution.

Older extractors and many truckmount systems are surprisingly noisy. Many manufacturers are now designing quieter machines and truckmounts that can be operated with all van doors closed, reducing the noise of the machine and increasing the comfort of the worker and nearby neighbors.

### **Sustainability: The Next Evolution**

We are now experiencing an evolution in Green Cleaning. Along with using

products and systems that protect health and have a reduced impact on the environment, Green Cleaning puts greater emphasis on sustainability, which is all about eliminating waste in energy use, supplies, fuel, and labor.



*Plan ahead to minimize fuel use and vehicle wear*

This is likely to have a big impact on carpet cleaning technicians. Sustainability applies to virtually every aspect of our business operations.

For instance, a first step involves simply scheduling jobs based on location and geographic area whenever possible in order to save driving time and fuel. Some jansan distributors and other cleaning professionals are now employing Web-based sustainable “dashboard” tools to help them measure such things as how much fuel and energy they use in their daily operations and where reductions can be made.

Further, the supplies used in our offices—everything from paper to printer ink—should be selected based on how environmentally responsible and sustainable they are, including whether they are derived from recycled materials and/or can be recycled themselves.

Earlier I mentioned equipment that is more than five years old should be replaced with newer, more environmentally sensitive models. These machines also typically have fewer components and use less fuel or electricity as well as less water. Newer truckmounts also have more effective emission-control systems and release fewer pollutants into the air.

### **What’s the Bottom Line?**

Because our goal here is to get to the “nuts and bolts” of Green carpet cleaning, we must also discuss its impact on the bottom line. As mentioned earlier, going Green can open new doors and opportunities for carpet cleaning technicians. This has already been proven in every sector of the cleaning profession and will be true for carpet cleaners as well.

Becoming Green--and especially more sustainable--is also a cost saver in itself. Businesses are finding that the more environmentally responsible and sustainable they become, the more they save. For some, these cost savings have been as significant as they are surprising.

Imagine protecting the environment, conserving natural resources for future generations, and saving money too. That’s a win-win-win situation that’s hard to beat.

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