



Taking the First Step into Green Cleaning: Definitions

According to recent surveys by this publication and others, the excitement about Green cleaning among janitor manufacturers and distributors is just beginning to trickle down to the thousands of carpet and professional cleaning companies in North America.

Therefore, for this segment of our industry, clarifications and definitions are surely in order. In fact, to learn about anything—especially trends that impact our industry as much as Green cleaning—professional cleaners must become familiar with the associated terms and terminology.

First, we need to define the term “Green cleaning,” so we are clear from the start what it is. Green cleaning is best defined in Executive Order 13101, which was signed by then President Bill Clinton in 1992.

The order, which directed the facility managers of thousands of federally-owned or -operated buildings worldwide to use only environmentally preferable cleaning products, says Green cleaning is “the use of products and services that reduce the health and environmental impacts compared to similar products and services used for the same purpose.”

In essence, the order promotes cleaning products, tools, and equipment that have less negative impact on building occupants and our environment. Note, this does not apply to just cleaning chemicals, Green cleaning should be viewed as a comprehensive program involving such things as:

Selecting the proper cleaning and maintenance chemicals, janitorial paper items, tools and equipment, such as vacuum cleaners with HEPA filtration, and floor machines with passive vacuum systems.

Using these products properly to reduce their impact on the health of custodial workers, building occupants, and the environment.

Developing a stewardship (overview and caretaking) program to help ensure the Green cleaning program is implemented correctly and continually.

Providing proper training and education for custodial workers, facility managers, and building occupants in both the program and the use of Green cleaning products.

Having all parties communicate well. Facility managers, building occupants, and cleaning professionals must all work together to make a Green cleaning program work. It is crucial, in order for a Green cleaning program to be effective, that all the parties involved in its implementation must be active participants. Little can be accomplished by just switching to a healthier cleaning product or tool or if few stakeholders are involved in the project. But, much can be done to improve the health of a facility when those involved are willing and actively involved.

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