

CT Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools

A nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting policies, practices and resources that protect school occupants from environmental health hazards

www.pollutionfreeschools.org

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Green Clean for Schools Campaign - Frequently Asked Questions

What is green cleaning?

There is no legal definition for “green cleaning” and no restriction on the use of the term by manufacturers. The CT Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools (ConnFESS) defines green cleaning as a 21st century approach to facility maintenance that uses cost-effective cleaning products and practices that protect human health and the environment. Cleaning products containing the least toxic compounds are utilized in combination with advanced technology and equipment that provide superior methods for removing dirt, soil and particulates found in indoor environments.

What kind of green clean policy has been established in Connecticut?

Our state government has already adopted and is now implementing a green clean policy for state buildings. As a result of Executive Order #14 issued by Governor Rell in 2006 and passage of PA 07-100: An Act Concerning the Use of Cleaning Products in State Buildings in 2007, the CT Department of Administrative Services with assistance from the CT Department of Environmental Protection has established green cleaning policies and procedures for state-owned buildings. CT State Vocational Technical Schools must comply with this law since they are state buildings, but all other elementary and secondary schools are not included. Environmentally preferable products must be procured and used for cleaning. Cleaning products regulated by FIFRA (the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act) such as disinfectants, disinfecting cleansers, sanitizers and antimicrobials or products for which no guidelines or environmental standards have been established are specifically excluded from this requirement.

What fiscal impact would the implementation of the proposed school green cleaning law have on local school districts?

The key components for school green clean legislation proposed by the CT Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools (ConnFESS) in 2009 include requirements that have been proven to save money or to be cost neutral. Requirements include the implementation of cost-effective best practices for green cleaning in schools (see fact sheet) as well as the phase in of environmentally preferable cleaning products certified by an independent third party such as Green Seal, Inc. and EcoLogo. Training in green cleaning for schools is available at no cost from a variety of sources. The transition to these environmentally preferable products will be assisted by the expertise already developed by the CT Department of Administrative Services pursuant to PA 07-100 as well as the purchasing power of the state to reduce costs for local school districts pursuant to PA 08-0002. Given the economic prognosis for the 2009 legislative session, unfunded mandates that would have required school districts to purchase advanced technology and equipment such as HEPA vacuums or high filtration floor buffer systems used in the most effective school green cleaning programs were not included in this proposed legislation.

What is an environmentally preferable product?

When defined by the federal government (Executive Order 13101), environmentally preferable products “means products or services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose. This comparison may consider raw materials acquisition, production, manufacturing, packaging, distribution, reuse, operation, maintenance or disposal of the product or service.”

Why is third-party certification of environmentally preferable products essential?

Many manufacturers and retailers are using terms such as “environmentally safe”, “green” or “non-toxic” to boost sales. Some of these claims may be true, but many are not. In order to ensure the health and safety of school children and employees as well as the effectiveness of these products, certification from third-party organizations such as Green Seal and EcoLogo is a must. Both of these third-party organizations have certified a vast array of high performing maintenance products suitable for use in school facilities.

What criteria should third-party certifying organizations meet?

In order to ensure the integrity of a third-party organization it must:

- Have an open, transparent process for setting standards that involves the public and key stakeholders;
- Clearly define the fees a manufacturer must pay for certification;
- Clearly identify any potential conflicts of interest;
- Have criteria for certification be publicly available and transparent;
- Base certification on consideration of human health and safety, ecological toxicity, other environmental impacts, and resource conservation, as appropriate, for the product and its packaging, on a life cycle basis;
- Require periodic revisions and updates of the standards;
- Monitor and enforce the standards, provide for the authority to inspect the manufacturing facilities, and periodically do so;
- Have a registered/legally protected certification mark;
- Make the standards easily accessible to purchasers and manufacturers (e.g. available for download on the program’s website);
- Be developed by consensus, if possible;
- Establish leadership levels in standards for products.

How is the US Environmental Protection Agency’s Design for the Environment or DfE different from Green Seal?

Design for the Environment (DfE) does not meet the criteria for third-party certification. The DfE team reviews ingredients in products for potential health and environmental issues and recommends safer alternatives for toxic chemicals. They do not verify what ends up in the product and do not inspect the manufacturer’s facility. In order to use the DfE logo, manufacturers simply sign a pledge stating they will use safer ingredients.

How is the GS-37 Green Seal, Inc. standard for general purpose cleaners helpful to school facilities managers?

GS-37 is a standard developed and periodically updated by Green Seal, Inc. that identifies general purpose cleaners, restroom, glass and carpet cleaners that are “environmentally preferable”. Cleaners covered by GS-37 are intended for routine use by institutions, warehouses and industrial facilities as well as schools, day-care centers and nursing homes. GS-37 does not apply to air fresheners, disinfectants or sanitizers.

The GS-37 standard enables school facilities managers to readily find and use safer alternatives to toxic cleaning chemicals without becoming an expert in the chemical analysis of cleaning chemicals. *Vendors of GS-37 products are required to provide free training to customers on the proper use of their cleaners.*

How does the recent fourth edition of the GS-37 standard provide better protection for school children and employees?

The newly adopted standard (August 2008) is more protective of vulnerable populations such as children, women of childbearing age, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding and immunocompromised individuals. Specific asthmagens (Diethanolamine and Triethanolamine) that cause asthma and phthalates will be eliminated from GS-37 cleaning products. The new standard also tightens restrictions for volatile organic compounds and pH levels while continuing to prohibit carcinogens.

What is the Cleaning for Health program?

The CT School Indoor Environment Resource Team is now offering a green cleaning program entitled Cleaning for Health. This program was developed to reduce asthma triggers and other adverse health effects from industrial cleaning. Cleaning for Health is an educational and technical assistance program designed to help schools transition to a new generation of less toxic cleaning chemicals and to adopt state-of-the-art cleaning practices. It focuses on three key concepts:

1. less toxic cleaning products certified by a third party as environmentally preferable
2. high filtration cleaning equipment
3. best practices

For further information, contact Kenny Foscue at 860-509-7740 at the CT Dept. of Public Health.

What is the Cleaning for Healthy Schools program?

This is an online toolkit that was developed by the National Collaborative Work Group on Green Cleaning and Chemical Policy Reform in Schools. Members of this work group include Healthy Schools Network, American Lung Association of New England, The Green Schools Initiative, National Association of School Nurses, INFORM and MassCOSH. The Toolkit has easy-to-use learning modules designed to introduce all audiences to the concept of green clean and Cleaning for Healthy Schools. The Cleaning for Healthy Schools Toolkit (www.cleaningforhealthyschools.org) is an open-source, industry-free, customizable, comprehensive program to safeguard human health, reduce exposure to chemicals and cost-effectively improve the performance of cleaning programs.