

## **Green Clean Best Practices**

### **Protect Human Health, the Environment and Taxpayers' Pocketbooks**

*Dollar for dollar the single best investment a school can make with their maintenance budget is to adopt and implement a well-run green cleaning program.*

(Collaborative for High Performance Schools' Maintenance and Operations Manual)

**A well-run green cleaning for schools program makes the cleaning process more effective, efficient, safer and more financially and environmentally responsible.**

#### **Best practices that save money include:**

1. Consolidating the overall number of cleaning products to a few effective, third-party independently certified environmentally preferable products.
2. Using one concentrated cleaner that is diluted for the following tasks:
  - bathroom/restroom cleaner
  - all purpose cleaner
  - carpet spotter/extraction cleaner
  - glass/window cleaner
  - neutral floor cleaner
3. Ordering concentrated environmentally safe products that are sold with reduced packaging for products and shipping containers frees up custodial closet space, saves on overall shipping charges and creates less waste for landfills.
4. Eliminating the use of aerosol cleaning products. Ounce for ounce aerosol cleaning products are more expensive than other equally effective cleaning solutions. Aerosols emit harmful fumes.
5. Using Green Seal certified products because they are specially designed to work with cold rather than hot water which saves on energy costs.

#### **Best practices that are cost-neutral include:**

1. Switching to environmentally preferable cleaning products certified by a third, independent party.
2. Using third-party certified handsoaps, not antibacterial foaming handsoaps.
3. Following instructions and precautions provided by the manufacturer. For example:
  - A) Using more product than recommended can result in damage to the surface being cleaned and produce residue. Cleaning products should not leave

residue that would require a fresh water rinse because that wastes time and water resources. Even more critical is that residues of cleaning chemicals on surfaces with which young children come into contact can result in a harmful exposure.

- B) Do not mix products.
4. Restrict use of disinfectants to pre-determined high risk areas. Disinfectants are registered pesticides and should never be used for sanitizing or general cleaning purposes. They should only be used as directed by the Department of Public Health and Centers for Disease Control.
  5. It is important to clean first and then use a disinfectant or germicide only if needed. Surfaces must be thoroughly cleaned first.
  6. Disinfectants should be allowed to remain on a surface for the required dwell time, which is usually about 10 minutes.
  7. Scheduling floor stripping and finishing and heavy duty carpet cleaning when school facilities are vacant. Custodial staff should wear recommended protective gear and proceed with caution. The school building should be well ventilated and aired out during summer vacations or extended holidays when these highly toxic chemicals are used.
  8. Vacuuming carpets regularly and thoroughly (5-7 passes of a carpet brush over each section) helps to maintain the life of the carpet and indoor environmental quality. It can reduce the need to use chemicals or water-based shampoo extraction products because regularly vacuumed carpets contain significantly less dirt, dust or food residue.
  9. Maintaining vacuum cleaners and filters. A vacuum will not clean well if the filter is clogged or the bag is full. If the filter or bag are not seated properly, particulates will bypass the filter and bag, spewing dust and debris into the air.
  10. Eliminating products that leave a scent in the room. Cleaning should leave no odor. Most fragrances added to a cleaning product do not enhance its effectiveness, but do irritate eyes and airways.

**Best practices that have minimal costs include:**

1. Providing faculty and administrative staff with a spray bottle of an approved green cleaning product for use when necessary, along with instructions for its use.
2. Establishing a written policy that is distributed to all members of the school community that states "No parent, teacher or staff member may bring into the school any consumer product which is intended to clean, deodorize or disinfect.

3. Installing multi-level scraper walk-off mats with nitrile rubber backing inside entranceways and outside where possible. They should be 15 – 20 feet long, span the entire entryway and be rotated on an appropriate schedule for weather conditions. Up to 90% of the dirt brought into schools comes from the soles of shoes. This essential green cleaning practice protects floors by stopping dirt at the door, makes floors easier to clean, and safer by reducing slipping. Walk-off mats can reduce the amount of tracked in dirt by about 70% and is a highly effective way of preventing contaminants from entering the building.

**Best practices that pay for themselves over time:**

1. Replacing traditional mops and cleaning rags with microfiber mops and cleaning cloths. Microfiber mops and cloths clean using just water or reduced amounts of chemicals. They are made of polyester and nylon fibers that trap everything from large dirt and dust particles to bacteria and can be cleaned in a washing machine and reused hundreds of times. Color-coded microfiber cleaning systems prevent cross-contamination. One study showed a 60% cost savings for mops, a 95% reduction in chemical costs and a 20% labor savings per day after using microfiber mops for a year.
2. Adopting a portion-control system using premeasured or automatic mixing and dispensing units eliminates mistaken measurements. Using a dilution station can reduce product consumption/waste by 30-65%.
3. Using HEPA or Green Label certified high performance vacuums to provide superior soil removal, dust containment and carpet appearance retention.

**Best practices to be considered when choosing flooring products during renovation or construction:**

1. Factoring in maintenance and disposal costs vs. initial purchase and installation costs. Over the lifespan of a floor, maintenance costs can exceed the initial costs by a factor of 2.5 to 25 times the initial cost of installation.
2. There are many new flooring alternatives to be considered which eliminate the need for toxic cleaning and maintenance products.
3. Carpeting in schools should be avoided because of the high VOC content of most new carpeting and the fact that carpeting retains many allergens and chemicals tracked in by shoes.
4. Environmental Choice ([www.environmentalchoice.com](http://www.environmentalchoice.com)) lists a “green” floor care program.