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Truths & Myths of Going Green

Since the pandemic, building owners and property management teams are now paying closer attention to the types of cleaning products and equipment they use while watching their bottom line. While proponents point to the benefits of a *green* clean, there are those who still remain skeptical. Many believe it takes “green to go green.” When it comes to comparing non-toxic or green cleaning products versus conventional cleaners, there is certainly confusion in the marketplace. Facility managers and procurement executives question green cleaning product costs, cleaning efficiency, safety and how good these products truly are for the environment.

This article will examine truths & myths surrounding green cleaning products. It will assess the costs and benefits of instituting green cleaning policies and products versus conventional ones. Additionally, it will provide some rationale on why green products are good for the health and well-being of your employees and your company’s bottom line.

It’s also not unusual to confuse words “eco-friendly” and “sustainable.” But it’s important to understand the distinctions when purchasing industrial cleaners and equipment for different cleaning and disinfecting jobs.

E*co-friendly’s* definition is “anything not harmful to the environment.” *Sustainability* means to “maintain without the depletion of natural resources.” When it comes to eco-friendly industrial cleaners, everything from production to packaging needs to be safe for the environment. But here’s where it can be tricky. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Green Guides which are designed to help marketers avoid making environmental claims that mislead consumers, say that for a product to be properly labeled as eco-friendly, a manufacturer must explain why their product is environmentally responsible on their packaging. Otherwise, it might not be safe for the environment based on its usage.

Here’s a look at eight different factors to consider before putting together your next industrial cleaning supplies list for effective building cleaning.

1. **Cost** – Too often, sustainable products are met with opposition because it’s perceived that following environmental best practices will be too costly. This myth couldn’t be further from the truth. Not only have green product prices dropped to comparable or below those of traditional cleaning products, but sustainable products can save your facility money while improving your building’s environmental profile. Chemical advances and the desire of manufacturers to rid the industry of harmful chemicals have led to this cost drop. In addition, green cleaning products are often sold in a higher chemical concentration, and therefore less product is needed. Forward-thinking companies of all sizes and sectors from healthcare, banking and education are acknowledging the importance of green products.
2. **Going green is too difficult** – Some organizations believe being sustainable is complex and difficult to follow. There are multiple organizations and certification programs to assist in following green guidelines. Consult with local Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) and local Green Seal chapters to understand ways to institute green facility maintenance and cleaning practices. Both organizations offer certification programs that outline various categories and best practices, as well as guides on certified products to help facility managers accelerate their sustainable efforts. It’s never been easier to follow green guidelines and make sure you are compliant. Additionally, look for products that are marked EcoCert, EPA Safer Choice or Green-E certified. These certifications are a guarantee the product is good for the environment.
3. **Effectiveness** – A common myth exists that green products will not be as effective on cleaning surfaces as their conventional cleaning counterparts. Just because a chemical cleaner is made in a more sustainable way doesn’t mean it won’t deliver on cleaning performance. Green products in most cases are just as effective as traditional cleaners that use harsh chemicals. However, since sustainable products don’t always include fast-acting chemicals, you will need to allow green products to soak a bit longer to have an effective “kill-time.” Each product is different so read the label. Many property owners and facility managers believe it’s worth the extra time if it means reducing exposure to toxic chemicals amongst building occupants. If you still are concerned about the effectiveness of green products, look for ones with the EcoLogo or Green Seal certifications. These are products that have undergone rigorous testing.
4. **Sustainable products decrease health concerns and increase worker productivity** – This has been a proven fact. Scientific evidence has made it clear that the type of cleaning products can have an impact on the health and wellness of building occupants. Companies committed to sustainability frequently outperform those that don’t consider the impact on their operation. In any given building, 90% of exposure to pollutants occurs indoors. Conventional product cleaners such as aerosol spray cans, bleach, detergents and carpet or floor cleaners can be dangerous for employees or custodial staff to inhale. When these products are used, volatile organic compounds (VOC) are released into the air and increase the likelihood of your employees or customers experiencing eye, skin and respiratory inflammation. Certified green commercial cleaning products and services eliminate harmful VOC’s, allowing everyone in your building to breathe easier. Using green products also have been known to increase worker productivity rates and decrease the number of employee or customer complaints.
5. **Impact on the Bottom Line** – As stated earlier, green products and equipment often don’t cost more than conventional products. In fact, some non-toxic products are less expensive than standard cleaning ones. Frequently, facility managers see cost savings from cleaning efficiencies and reduced chemical usage. By implementing high-efficiency green cleaning programs, cleaning costs can be reduced by lowering the frequency of cleanings.
6. **Safety** – True green products are generally believed to be much safer to use and pose less of a risk to humans and the environment. Check your labels carefully. Skeptics point to a marketing trend called “greenwashing,” where a company or organization spends more time and money on marketing themselves as *environmentally friendly* than on minimizing their environmental impact. But evidence shows that green cleaners are safer and leave less of a carbon footprint. (**Insert a known study from Jake or Neal**)
7. **Environmental-Friendly** – One of the great advantages of using sustainable products is they don’t pollute the environment. Green cleaning decreases pollution, resource depletion and global climate change. Since they are derived from renewable, biodegradable resources, their usage doesn’t hurt the planet’s ecosystem as much as traditional cleaning products do.
8. **Company reputation and brand image** – Even before the pandemic, smart facility managers understood that potential employees or customers were scrutinizing regulatory and compliance reports to determine if they want to work for a particular company or conduct business with them. Now smart organizations are placing more emphasis on regulatory and compliance policies and using them in recruiting and new business efforts. Smart companies also are highlighting their green cleaning programs and training their custodial staffs in the latest green certifications and using them as a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Green cleaning is a win-win situation for all stakeholders. Science has made it clear that cleaning products can have an impact on the safety, health and cleanliness of a building. Many commonplace myths about green cleaning products versus conventional ones can now be put to rest. While it can be difficult to pinpoint exact cost savings, there is no question that today’s savvy building owners and property management teams understand the benefits of green cleaners from increasing the longevity of their building’s floors, walls and office equipment to intangible health and environmental benefits.

So the next time you hear the expression “it takes green to go green,” you’ll have accurate information to dispel that myth and discuss why your organization didn’t consider going green sooner.

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