

Fundamentals of Effective Cleaning Programs: Sustainability and Performance



Embracing More Sustainable Cleaning Practices

Using cleaning products with sustainability in mind is easier than you think

This is a challenging time for facility managers. They must meet the new and heightened cleanliness standards. At the same time, they are encouraged to reduce the impact of standard facility operations on the natural environment. Effective cleaning has never been more important. That can mean cleaning more often, and cleaning with stronger or additional chemicals. On the other hand, current and future regulations will likely drive the use of products that help protect and sustain the environment.

Customers and facility managers expect cleaner surfaces. Facility managers often must clean more often or with improved protocols and products in the same amount of time vs. pre-pandemic, and with the same number of staff – or less. On top of facility cleaning, staff training is also paramount. Training protocols must be straightforward and simple to learn. If they are not, there could be an increased risk for inefficiencies both in process and environmental control.

How do you know if your cleaning solutions have sustainability attributes?

Worldwide, there is no consensus definition of sustainable, or “green,” cleaning. Very broadly, it means using products and processes that help reduce potential harm to the environment. This can include solutions that are recyclable, manufactured using plant-based materials, and/or that help reduce waste. Working towards a program that includes sustainable facility cleaning techniques can include the use of biodegradable cleaners and concentrated cleaning solutions that reduce packaging and require less space, fuel and cost related to shipping and storage.

Product packaging itself can be managed with an eye towards sustainability, and managers can reduce waste by managing the quantity of packages (e.g. boxes and plastic bottles) required for sufficient inventories. Buying larger sizes in bulk can reduce output of packaging materials and can even help reduce inventory costs. Facility managers are also exploring solutions that reduce the frequency of cleaning or enhance durations between cleaning cycles. This helps reduce the overall need for materials and energy usage.



Control chemical usage

Cleaning chemicals in concentrate form are not new, and neither is the need to accurately dilute chemicals in order to maximize their effectiveness during cleaning procedures.

A particular issue in this framework is that cleaning chemical dilutions are often imprecise. Even when cleaning solutions are carried out by experienced staff, the typical process of manual dilution leaves plenty of room for error. Under- and over-diluted chemicals can potentially present concerns associated with cleaning chemical efficacy, employee handling, excess cost and product waste.

Major cleaning product suppliers have responded with chemical management and dilution systems that help reduce manual dilution processes for cleaning and disinfection. Compact, easy-to-use dispensers make it simpler for even inexperienced staff to automatically dispense properly-diluted solutions – maximizing the use of both chemicals and water in cleaning operations.

An added benefit: because cleaning staff are using one set of instructions to dispense a range of dilutions for different applications, facility managers can expect improvements in labor efficiency as well as consistently clean environments.

Focus on floor care

In floor care, managing chemical use is essential. A great many floors in a variety of substrates are finished in acrylic, which can require as many as six coats for a commercial-grade shine. This material is sensitive to moisture, so dirt and debris can work their way in between these layers. Acrylic finishes therefore require frequent burnishing and scrubbing, along with the related materials, energy (such as electricity or other equipment fuel) and labor to maintain appearances.

This, in turn, means more stripping and recoating – a process involving chemicals that break down acrylic polymers, and the required disposal of the resulting sticky residue before new acrylic coats are applied.

Well-designed floor protection and enhancement products can reduce the need for aggressive maintenance such as burnishing on a variety of resilient substrates. Floor protection solutions can be applied in just one coat, and enhancement products incorporate daily routine floor maintenance protocols. They resist abrasion and soil penetration, preserving and maintaining the gloss of flooring – in turn, reducing the frequency of burnishing and full chemical strip-and-recoat processes. Floor protection combined with daily floor enhancement can also help



reduce the need for abrasive floor cleaners or pads, reducing the lifetime cost of the pads as well as the related packaging, recycling and disposal.

While abrasive pads are commonly used for burnishing, they are also becoming popular for creating and maintaining a polished shine on substrates such as concrete, terrazzo and stone. They can also replace heavy coats of chemical finishes and can create a polished look with or without floor protectors or enhancers.

This is especially true for concrete floors, which can be polished to an attractive shine without the use of coatings.

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