

Introduction to Green Cleaning and Green Cleaning Programs

Executive Order 4 (EO 4) - Establishing a State Green Procurement and Agency Sustainability Program, which directs state agencies, public authorities and public benefit corporations, to green their procurements and to implement sustainability initiatives, including the use green cleaning products. In addition, New York State amended the state Education Law Section 409-i and Finance Law Section 163-b (referred to as Chapter 584 of the Laws of 2005—*The New York State Green Cleaning Law*) to require mandatory use of environmentally sensitive (green) cleaning products in elementary and secondary schools. The intent of both EO 4 and the *Green Cleaning Law* is to allow schools and state agencies to select products that clean effectively and minimize adverse impacts on children and employee health and the environment. In amending the *Green Cleaning Law*, New York became the first state in the nation to require mandatory use of green cleaning products in all public and non-public elementary and secondary schools. The law has been in effect since September 1, 2006. The New York State Office of General Services (OGS), along with representatives from New York's State Education Department, Department of Health, Department of Labor, and Department of Environmental Conservation, has created, and frequently updates, an approved list of green cleaning products. This list is available on the New York State Green Cleaning Program website. The Green Cleaning Program Toolkit and the OGS approved Green Cleaning Products List are appropriate for use by both schools and state agencies.

However, it is important to note that implementing green cleaning in schools and state agencies is more than simply switching to use of green cleaning products. Green cleaning uses a holistic approach to both cleaning and maintenance of a facility and incorporates green cleaning chemicals and high performance cleaning equipment; commitment and participation of building occupants; measurable goals and objectives; a green cleaning plan; training; written procedures and policies; and education of building occupants. These components are consistent with well-recognized programs for facility operations and maintenance, including the United States Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) ranking systems, and the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) *High Performance Schools Guidelines* (NY-CHPS).

Implementation of a comprehensive Green Cleaning Program includes the use of green cleaning products, equipment and best practices that result in many benefits:

- **reduced exposure of building occupants to toxic chemicals;**
- **safer work environments** for custodial staff through training programs and reduced exposure to toxic and dangerous chemicals;
- **higher cleaning efficiency** by reducing the amount of dirt/soil entering the building, improved cleaning processes and systems, and reduced frequency of labor intensive tasks;
- **cost savings** through reduced chemical use;
- **fewer injuries** to custodial staff;
- promotion of better inventory management of chemicals and equipment;

- **meeting obligations** of the *New York State Green Cleaning Law* and EO 4;
- lowered environmental impact/footprint of the facility; and
- **improved indoor air quality.**

Because of improvements in technology and manufacturing, **the green cleaning products on the OGS-approved Green Cleaning Products List are safer and more effective than traditional products, and comparable in cost.** The products on this list have undergone rigorous certification processes by organizations like Green Seal, Inc. and/or Ecologo to assure they meet green cleaning standards. Along with improved green cleaning chemicals, high performance equipment can effectively capture and remove more soil with the use of fewer chemicals than traditional equipment. Performance advancements include products such as microfiber materials, special vacuum cleaner air filters (called high-efficiency particulate air filters or HEPA filters), and floor machines equipped with dust collection systems that keep dust from becoming airborne during floor burnishing.

The responsibility and ownership of a Green Cleaning Program is shared among many stakeholders; **the success of a Green Cleaning Program does not fall solely upon the school's custodial staff.** Stakeholders include:

- **Administrators/School Board and PTA Members/State Leaders:** As members of the Green Cleaning Team, these stakeholders should continually promote the Program and the transition to a healthier, cleaner, and more environmentally-conscious facility. It is important to communicate regularly on the progress of the Program, and inspire accomplishment and pride in all other stakeholder groups.
- **Teachers, Staff and other Employees:** These groups will have a healthier and more productive work environment, and greater knowledge of green cleaning practices through program training.
- **Custodial Supervisors:** This group will realize a higher quality of work throughout the facility and have the necessary tools to effectively evaluate their staff's cleaning efforts and performance. As supervisors, they must have a system of regular communication with stakeholders on the progress and challenges of implementing the Program.
- **Custodial Staff:** The custodians will receive valuable training, be more efficient at their job, and work in safer conditions.
- **School Nurses:** The school nurse and other health-care providers will see a reduction in asthma and respiratory symptoms caused by allergens and chemicals.

- **Students:** Students will be learning in safe, healthy environments without exposure to toxic chemicals.
- **Parents:** Parents will have the comfort of knowing their children are healthier, and that school leaders care about health and environmental issues.

In addition, the school or state Health and Safety Committees should include representatives of these groups and may be able to help develop or enhance the green cleaning program

A Green Cleaning Program can be implemented in 5 steps:

Step 1: Groundwork—Identify stakeholders and establish a Green Cleaning Team of representatives from each stakeholder group.

Step 2: Assessment—Perform a facility Green Cleaning Baseline Assessment that evaluates current cleaning practices and provides the foundation for the Program’s goals and objectives.

Step 3: Planning—Establish the facility’s green cleaning goals and objectives, and produce a written Program complete with timeline for implementation and measures for evaluation.

Step 4: Implementation—Roll out new initiatives outlined in the written Program. Continue regular communication between the Team and stakeholders on progress towards meeting the Program’s goals and objectives.

Step 5: Evaluation—Assess the effectiveness of the Program after a set period of time using measurable benchmarks and feedback from stakeholders; address problems, incorporate changes, and highlight and reward success!

A **Green Cleaning Program** provides the foundation for cleaning and maintenance activities by documenting the frequency of specific activities, procedures used, amount of time required for the activities, and the chemical and equipment resources required for Program implementation. It also incorporates green cleaning Best Practices, such as installing properly fitted walk-off mats at entryways, using high performance equipment to improve indoor air quality, and improving routine maintenance practices.

In addition, a facility can institute **green cleaning policies** to strengthen their Green Cleaning Program. Examples include a policy prohibiting the use cleaning products brought from home, or a policy on the use of disinfectants. For your convenience, OGS has prepared *An Introduction to Green Cleaning* trifold brochure included in the Program Toolkit section of this website. This can be used to promote and inform stakeholders of efforts to establish a Green Cleaning Program in your facility.

A Green Cleaning Program can be cost effective. While chemicals and labor are the primary costs associated with any cleaning program, there are many green cleaning products that are cost competitive and offer the same cleaning power as traditional products. Because many green cleaning products are sold in concentrated form, and used for multiple cleaning tasks, the actual “use cost” may even be less than some traditional “ready-to-use” products. To evaluate the cost-effectiveness of a green cleaning product, take into account its final dilution volume, shipping costs, possible reduction of work-related injuries, and increased productivity due to a healthier work environment. Because of its large surface area and the wear of day-to-day traffic, floor care is the most important component of a cleaning program and also the most labor-intensive. A Green Cleaning Program focuses on extending the life of flooring by doing less time-consuming and labor-intensive cleaning by using appropriate cleaning products and equipment.

The New York State Office of General Services has created a comprehensive website dedicated to providing facilities with the information and tools needed for developing a successful Green Cleaning Program. Creating a Green Cleaning Program is not a requirement under the *Green Cleaning Law*; however a Green Cleaning Program has real benefits, many of which have been described here. The New York State Green Cleaning Program website provides a central location of resources and information that schools can use to easily begin a Green Cleaning Program. Features Include:

- Green Cleaning Best Practices
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions
- Program Toolkit outlining the Five Steps to a Green Cleaning Program
- Online Training Courses
- The OGS-Approved Green Cleaning Products List;
- Customizable Documents and Templates

In addition, the website offers information on key policies and guidelines, additional resources, and updates. Facilities are at liberty to use all or some of these tools to create a Program to suit their needs and budget. The New York State Office of General Services Environment Services Unit is committed to promoting and supporting Green Cleaning Programs, and is available to assist in any way possible. For more information, contact OGS at:

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