

cleansweep

Green Cleaning

by Bruce Albright

Our community is abuzz with “green cleaning.” Since the introduction of LEED® certification for commercial buildings and the enthusiasm by facility managers to implement healthier, environmental standards, cleaning service companies have rushed to the market with “green” printed on everything.

However, very few of the hundreds of cleaning service companies in Texas truly understand what “green” cleaning entails. Cleaning operations for these “green washed” companies do very little to protect the health of occupants, improve indoor air quality or improve our structural environment. Green washed organizations primarily practice a Trash-N-Dash system of collecting trash and spot cleaning. The only change they have made is to switch to “green chemicals.” This has developed into a new risk for facility managers looking to implement green cleaning. Without knowing the difference, it would be easy to award your cleaning contract to a green washed company. To avoid this new risk, it becomes necessary to understand the intent, standards, and requirements needed to implement a green cleaning program in your facility.

What is Green Cleaning?

“Green Cleaning” as it is defined by most is the use of cleaning chemicals and equipment that has a lesser environmental impact than traditional products. However, the intent is to clean in a manner that reduces the exposure of occupants, maintenance workers, and visitors to harmful particulate matter (PM). Particulate matter adversely affects air quality, health, building systems and our environment. The Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) goal for clean air is **“Protect and improve the air so it is healthy to breathe, and risks to human health and the environment are reduced.”** So we can see that a cornerstone of green cleaning is operational protocols that address indoor air quality (EQ).

Current green cleaning standards require that a vacuum operate at or below 69dba and have a filtration level that captures 96% of PM that is .003 microns or larger. To achieve the intent of green cleaning, you must go farther. Custodians responsible for vacuuming should be trained in the proper use and maintenance of the vacuum, how to properly empty the dust collection bag so that PM is not re-distributed into the air, when to check the filter bag, and to log the filter bag changes.

The standards and protocols required to implement green cleaning start with a cleaning company’s written program.

The program should include, at minimum, the following:

- Custodial Operational Procedures
- Custodial Staffing Plan
- Custodial Training Program
- Certified Cleaning Chemicals and Equipment (including Microfiber, MSDS Written Program, Cleaning for At-Risk Occupants)
- Verification Audit
- Continuous Improvement Policy
- Log Books
- Color Coding
- Document Management

Each of these elements must be detailed in-depth and in concert with your written green cleaning policy.

Professional Janitorial Service offers a half day work shop on green cleaning. If you would like to attend a workshop, contact Jim Shaw at jshaw@pjs.com +

Bruce Albright

Bruce Albright is a LEED® Accredited Professional for Professional Janitorial Services in Houston. If you want to contact Bruce, call him at 713-515-3026 or email balbright@pjs.com.