

GREEN CLEANING FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS



Paul Goldin – Avmor
Chief Sustainability
Officer
Director of Marketing
and Technical Services

Let's face it, nobody wants to be sick. It is an inconvenience to you, your family and your co-workers, as well as to your employer. Yet, according to the Conference Board of Canada, Canadian absenteeism rates are high - and rising.

Absenteeism has increased by 14% since 1992. It costs employers \$603 a day for each day that an employee is not at work. In Canada alone, absenteeism costs the country an alarming \$10 billion a year and it is one of the major issues confronting employers.

Many of the ailments which cause absenteeism (such as the common cold, the flu, gastroenteritis) are preventable through proper hand washing and the implementation of an effective cleaning program in the workplace.

CLEANING EFFICIENCY

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the average person spends about 90% of his or her time indoors. Given this fact, and the poor air quality in many buildings and homes, it is no wonder that asthma and certain types of cancer are on the rise. Asthma alone is estimated to contribute to \$2.4 billion in lost productivity in Canada each year and 12% of respondents in the E.P.A. survey said that they had missed an average of 34 work days in the past 12 months due to asthma, resulting in 8,160,000 lost days.¹

In addition, researchers have linked asthma, cancer and other problems such as dizziness, skin irritation, allergies, and reproductive disorders to exposure to chemicals found in many traditional cleaners. Failure to deal adequately with the underlying causes of these issues takes its toll on the health, comfort, and performance of your employees. Green cleaning can play a vital role in creating a healthier environment, and as a consequence, improve the quality of life and wellness for your employees and building occupants.

HEALTH

Proper Hand Washing

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, hands spread an estimated 80% of common infectious diseases, such as the cold and the flu. For example, when you touch a contaminated doorknob and then touch your mouth, you can get sick. Germs can live for a surprisingly long time on hard surfaces. The good news is that disease-causing germs are easily eradicated with proper hand washing.

Consider all the items that we come into contact with daily:

- Phones
- Desks
- Computer keyboards
- Light switches
- Door knobs
- Hand Rails
- Elevator buttons
- Water taps

As opposed to toilets and sinks, which are cleaned regularly, these contact points are just some of the "hot spots" which harbor viruses, as they are not as frequently cleaned and disinfected. Thus, the easiest way to reduce your chances of getting sick is to wash your hands often with regular soap and water and to avoid touching your face.

Proper hand washing is still the single most important measure for preventing the spread of germs, viruses and infection. Failure to wash hands thoroughly and not spending enough time washing hands are the major obstacles to infection control. Hand sanitizers are useful alternatives if soap and water are unavailable and should be placed in high traffic areas where possible.

¹ The Asthma Society of Canada, 2005



ENVIRONMENT

As far as cleaning products are concerned, those that are formulated with non harmful ingredients are more advantageous as they are widely used and come into contact with almost every surface in an office space. Nowadays, there is more of a demand for green cleaning products than ever before. The negative impact that traditional cleaning products have on health and the environment can no longer be ignored.

The following statistics speak for themselves:

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ranks indoor air quality among the top five environmental risks and links it, in part, to cleaning product exposure.
- The average janitor uses an estimated 100 liters of chemicals per year.
- The cleaning industry uses an estimated 5 billion pounds of chemicals each year and many of these cleaning products have significant adverse impacts on indoor air quality (IAQ), human health, and the environment.

For example:

- Acids from toilet bowl cleaners may cause burns to the skin, as well as blindness.
- Traditional glass cleaners contain a form of glycol ether known to be a skin absorbing poison.
- Chemicals released from aerosol containers can circulate through the air and enter the bloodstream, which can affect the nervous system and other organs.
- Some industrial and household cleaning products can create a respiratory hazard when used in poorly ventilated areas.
- Some cleaning agents contain chemical substances that can harm the earth's protective ozone layer or toxic chemicals that are persistent in the environment and do not degrade easily.

Concern over the effects of traditional cleaners has led to the development of a wide range of environmentally preferable cleaning products. These products can handle the same commercial, industrial, and residential cleaning needs as traditional cleaners. Growing demand for these products has driven costs down. Environmentally friendly cleaners are now competitively priced in comparison to traditional products. However, not all green cleaning products are created equal. It is important to take the time to do the research in order to ensure that you have chosen the best products for your company or your household's needs.

The product you choose should meet the following criteria:

- ✓ **Performance** – Saves time while cleaning effectively and ensures the pristine appearance of your buildings.
- ✓ **People** – Safeguards the health and safety of building operators, custodial staff, employers, occupants and visitors.
- ✓ **Planet** – Raw materials should be biodegradable and meet the highest environmental standards for safe storage usage, transportation and disposal. More specifically, materials used should be safe for our water system and aquatic life.
- ✓ **Price** – Priced competitively when compared to conventional cleaning products in the same categories. In addition, most green cleaning products come in concentrated form, thereby reducing shipping and storage cost.



Certifications: It is also important to check the product's certifications. Some products may claim to be "green", without having been certified by a reputable organization. Therefore, look for certified cleaning chemicals by organizations such as:



- **The EcoLogo Program:** EcoLogo™ is North America's largest, most respected environmental standard and certification mark. EcoLogo provides customers – public, corporate and consumer – with assurance that the products and services bearing the logo meet stringent standards of environmental leadership.



- **Green Seal (GS):** Green Seal is a non-profit organization that uses science-based programs to empower consumers, purchasers and companies to create a more sustainable world.



- **Design for the Environment (DFE):** Design for the Environment allows manufacturers to put the DfE label on household and commercial products, such as cleaners and detergents, that meet stringent criteria for human and environmental health. Using these products can protect your family's health and the environment.



- **Eco-Label:** A European ecomarking logotype – created in 1992 by the European Committee in order to facilitate production and consumption of goods at each, which life cycle is environment friendly at all stages, in comparison to other goods and services, thus ensuring careful and efficient use of resources and environment protection.



- **Swan – Nordic Ecolabel:** The "Swan" symbol, as it is known in Nordic countries is available for 65 product groups, demonstrates that a product is a good environmental choice. The Swan checks that products fulfill certain criteria using methods such as samples from independent laboratories, certificates and control visits. Each Nordic country has local offices with the responsibility for criteria development, control visits, licensing and marketing.

It is worth noting that even "green" chemicals can be harmful if not used properly. For example, most of the exposure limits included in the Green Seal Standard is based on an assumption that products will be diluted properly. If they are not, some of the Green Seal certified products - or the products certified by other rating organizations - may be hazardous. For this reason, it is important to look for products with dilution control. By providing accurate dilutions, the products will perform at their optimal level, thereby maximizing effectiveness by preventing wastage, and making cleaning easier and safer on your employees.

Green Building Audit

It is important to conduct a green building audit allowing a qualified person address the use of toxic chemicals in the building cleaning progress, including possible adverse effects on the employees, such as skin sensitivities and eye irritations, and to what extent green cleaning materials are being used. An inventory of existing cleaning products is established and alternative green cleaning products and practices are recommended. A certified green building auditor is trained to examine the processes it takes to clean a facility, the products used, and their efficiency. He or she will provide recommendations to simplify the maintenance process and to incorporate greener practices, products and equipments.

Going green need not be an overwhelming process. Developing a plan and setting priorities to have the changes made in stages will help make the transition easier. Communication is key to the success of integrating an effective green cleaning program. To ensure that buildings are cleaned safely, workers should receive employer-paid training about lighting, electricity and energy conservation,



indoor air quality, and the use of green cleaning products. Building owners and companies should consider transition to day shift cleaning where possible. This will help reduce nighttime energy loads, reduce global warming pollution, and cut costs. This transition can phase in over a period of several months to ensure an adequate adjustment period for the workforce. Day cleaning saves energy, but it also means that maintenance staff will be working alongside building occupants. Building owners and managers should keep occupants informed about transition and implementation of day cleaning and green cleaning plans so they become partners in the process of making the workplace green. Good customer service, support and training can be as important as the right cleaning solution. Look for a company that can offer added value and support in the form of hands-on training, sanitation programs, color coded wall charts, color coded cloths, proper labels and MSDS sheets. These extra tools are an integral part of the process of going green.

From green cleaning material to green cleaning equipment, it is important to reduce exposure of building occupants and maintenance personnel to potentially hazardous chemical, biological and particle contaminants which adversely impact air quality, health, building finishes, building systems and the environment.

Improving employee health is often touted as a way to reduce long-term absenteeism due to illness. This relatively new movement includes promoting wellness or health management as a "more preventative and holistic method" of tackling the problem of absenteeism. By carefully evaluating and purchasing environmentally sound cleaning chemicals, cleaning methods and cleaning equipment, businesses can realize significant productivity gains and increase the indoor air quality (IAQ). An effective green cleaning program not only gives your building a positive aesthetic, but it will ensure the optimal performance of your employees and go a long way to promote health, safety, and social consciousness.

About Avmor Ltd.

Headquartered in Laval, Quebec, Avmor is Canada's leading manufacturer of professional cleaning solutions aimed at the Jan/San and Foodservice markets. Avmor holds a GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) license, which is a prerequisite to be able to manufacture hand soaps that include disinfection claims and a DIN (Drug Identification number) provided by Health Canada. Avmor offers a full range of hand care products. Avmor's complete line of cleaning products include Cleaners/Degreasers, Floor Care, Washroom Care, Food Service Care, Hand Care, BioMaxx, Disinfectants and others. Some of Avmor's signature brands are Av-mixx Dilution Control System, **Biomor Biological Cleaning Solutions**, Quick Stuff Food Service Cleaning System, Synergy Floor Care and **EcoPure**, its environmentally responsible sanitation program. Avmor has over 40 certified Ecologo products. For over 60 years, Avmor has remained at the industry forefront, defining product performance standards and striving for the safest and most cost-effective cleaning systems for professional use. Avmor Ltd. is a privately held company.

