



Corporate Express Sustainable Earth Success Story

Transportation District Cruises to Cost Savings on Cleaning Chemicals while Improving the Environment

"I used to feel the term 'green' had a negative connotation to it. I always shied away from green products because, in my 15 years of experience, green products typically didn't work that well. But I would tell people today to reserve an opinion until you've tried Sustainable Earth products. Try these before you speak because they really get the job done. It's been a long time coming."

**Dan Koenig, Facilities Services,
Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon**

Highlights

Organization

TriMet (Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon)

Industry & Market

TriMet, more formally known as the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, is a public agency that operates mass transit in a region that spans most of the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area. TriMet provides the region's bus system, the MAX Light Rail system and the Portland Streetcar as well as LIFT paratransit service required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Key Business Challenges

- Having to purchase dozens of different chemicals to complete a cleaning task
- Suffering waste due to using too much cleaning chemicals for jobs
- Reducing end-user irritation from harsh chemicals

Key Business Successes

- An estimated 70 percent decrease in cleaning chemical costs
- Less cleaning chemical waste by reducing overall number of chemicals required to get the job done
- Provided a cleaner, healthier cleaning solution with pleasant odors
- Increased facilities staff and customer satisfaction

Challenge:

As part of its transportation infrastructure, TriMet manages and maintains approximately 15 different facilities ranging from administration offices to employee rest rooms and work areas, as well as approximately 750 buses and 60 separate train cars. Since TriMet is a public agency, they must satisfy a variety of taxpayer, government and regulatory constituencies while

providing a superior and competitive product and environment. Therefore, costs of – as well as materials used in – maintaining TriMet facilities must be able to survive intense public scrutiny.

To effectively clean and maintain its facilities and vehicles, TriMet was previously purchasing dozens of different chemicals to complete cleaning tasks and suffering significant waste due to using too many chemicals for jobs. That coupled with the cumulative impact of harsh cleaning chemicals on TriMet's employees and the environment, persuaded TriMet to consider incorporating environmentally friendly cleaning products into its facilities management repertoire. After assessing different "green" cleaning solutions, the primary issues became: will they work, will they be cost efficient and will the public accept them. After introducing Sustainable Earth cleaning products into its operations, TriMet discovered the answer to all three concerns was a resounding "Yes!"

Solution:

TriMet began using Sustainable Earth cleaning products as soon as they were introduced to the Portland marketplace in 2003. Although TriMet decision makers were interested in environmental and sustainability issues – like most facilities management decisions, the selection of new cleaning products at TriMet was driven primarily by a need for products that perform.

"We need products that will do the job that we need to do," said Dan Koenig, a member of the facilities services team at TriMet. "We're very particular about what we use and we're not willing to give up anything in terms of quality."

TriMet began utilizing four Sustainable Earth products - SE 64 (for floors and other general cleaning), SE 61 (for windows), SE 71 (for toilets and urinals) and SE 66 (disinfectant). Starting with four products greatly reduced the questions of knowing which product to use for which task. In addition, the Sustainable Earth dilution system made mixing the right combination of cleaning agent and water practically effortless for TriMet employees, ultimately resulting in less product waste. Other than a short training period where end users became used to the dilution system and incorporating a short "dwell time" (allowing product to stand before wiping or washing), end-user implementation was relatively pain free. The estimated training time for each end user was approximately 30 minutes.

Impact:

With the Sustainable Earth line of cleaning products TriMet did not have to sacrifice quality – and it achieved incredible gains in the following areas:

- User satisfaction
- Cost savings
- Public acceptance
- Environmental impact

According to Koenig, since TriMet incorporated Sustainable Earth products into its facilities management practices, the organization has witnessed a nearly 30 percent decrease in its cleaning chemical costs. In addition, end users doing the cleaning have found that the products perform as well as or even better than the products they were using previously – with the added bonus of reducing or eliminating users' eye, skin and nose irritations caused by harsh chemicals used in many cleaning products.

“I actually think it has made the work easier,” Koenig said. “If nothing else, we’re only using four different chemicals now where we used to use dozens. This is a cost savings right off the bat.”

“Some workers were very skeptical at first because they simply couldn’t believe you didn’t need to use full strength to get the job done,” said Koenig. “But the transition was relatively easy. Because these products are so user friendly, we didn’t need to change any of our tools like mops or brushes. The only thing we really changed was the chemicals.”

With the harsh cleaning products TriMet once used, chemical waste was a given, Koenig said. Utilizing what Koenig called the “glug” system, facilities workers used to guess at how much or how little of a chemical it would take to do a job. With Sustainable Earth, each job is easily accomplished with pre-measured amounts – eliminating waste and allowing a single bottle of Sustainable Earth chemicals to last for an average of about four months. Finally, Sustainable Earth cleaning products have allowed TriMet to take pride not only in how their facilities look, feel and smell – but also in how the products protect and preserve the natural environment and the workers who work in that environment.

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