

Know How to Clean Green!

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Introduction

So you want to start offering green cleaning services to your clients? You may see this as a way to expand service capabilities or help differentiate your business from the competition.

Now that you have made the big decision to offer green cleaning services, where to you go from here? This article provides a short overview of what it takes and what a Building Service Contractor needs to do in order to “go green”.

Future Trends

If it hasn't happened already, expect clients to start asking about or requesting green cleaning services. Already, thousands of facilities are inquiring about or are in the process of becoming LEED certified. The LEED program (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is a program administered by the U.S. Green Building Council that certifies existing or new buildings as “green”. A component of the LEED certification program for existing buildings offers certification credits for green cleaning. In fact, approximately 25% of the credits needed for LEED certification comes from the cleaning process.

As interest in all things green intensifies, more inquiries about cleaning services that focus on green cleaning can be expected. In fact, BSC's can now have their services green certified to the new Environmental Standard for Cleaning Services GS-42 adopted by Green Seal.

Do Your Homework

A BSC should educate themselves on green cleaning in general. A common misconception is that simply using “green” products is all that is needed. A host of

Green Cleaning Principles
<i>Clean to protect human health first</i>
<i>Minimize human exposure to contaminants and cleaning residues</i>
<i>Make a commitment to education and training</i>
<i>Minimize the pollutants entering a building, maximize their removal</i>
<i>Schedule and emphasize routine, preventive maintenance</i>
<i>Ensure worker and building occupant safety at all times</i>
<i>Communicate goals and the benefits of green cleaning</i>
<i>Use chemicals that minimize human and environmental impacts</i>
<i>Take a holistic approach to building maintenance</i>

resources including website and industry magazines offer good information that will help you realize that green cleaning is about much more than just the use of appropriate products.

Green Cleaning is built around several

founding principles (summarized in the above table) that you should be aware of to help guide your efforts. Knowing and understanding these principles will undoubtedly assist you with marketing of your green cleaning services.

Getting Started

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The mechanics of getting started means thorough documentation of each and every cleaning and maintenance function that your company performs. This document is referred to as an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) that includes everything from cleaning a restroom to dusting furniture.

Training must be conducted for all employees that include OSHA mandated training and addition operational training of employees on any and all functions the employee will be performing. This training must be documented for each employee.

Client Specific Procedures

When a client requests green cleaning services, the first thing a BSC should do is conduct a Green Building Survey. This is a detailed inspection of all phases of building operation that may have an impact on indoor air quality and human health. Cleaning product manufacturers can usually provide some direction on what to look for and how to conduct the survey.

The next step is to create a facility green cleaning plan that incorporates all phases of the services that will be provided. The plan also incorporates procedures to address issues identified in the Green Building Survey. The facility plan would include schedules for all routine maintenance that will be conducted. Green Cleaning does not recommend advance scheduling of restorative processes (i.e. Striping of floors, Carpet Extraction, etc.) as proper execution of the program is designed to reduce these processes.

The facility plan must also provide protocol with the client to solicit feedback and facilitate communication. Part of the communications would include notifying “vulnerable populations” within a facility before conducting non-routine maintenance operations. Vulnerable populations are individuals that have significant allergies, special sensitivities or other health problems that may be impacted by these operations.

Green Cleaning Focal Points

Every facility plan must address specific focal points that embody the proactive approach that green cleaning takes toward maintaining a facility. These focal points listed in the table below should be properly addressed with a written SOP.

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One example of this proactive approach is the focus on entryways. You may already know about the importance of walk off matting to help protect the appearance and extend the longevity of floor finish on hard floors. Green Cleaning requires that entryways and adjacent areas immediately outside be addressed with an effective maintenance program that includes appropriate walk off matting.

Green Cleaning Focal Points	
Entryways	Special attention is given to the point where the bulk of contaminants enter a facility
Hard Floor Care	A maintenance program that emphasizes routine, scheduled maintenance to extend finish life
Carpet Care	A maintenance program that emphasizes routine maintenance to regularly remove trapped contaminants
Efficient Use of Chemicals	A method of insuring that chemicals are diluted properly through a supplied measuring system or device.
Restroom Cleaning	A thorough and regularly scheduled maintenance program for restrooms.
Disinfection	A plan for appropriate use of disinfectants in areas only where needed.
Dining and Break Rooms	Addressing these areas where bacteria, odors, and pests can accumulate
Trash Collection & Recycling	A protocol for collection and disposal of trash and general recycling guidelines and policies
Training Requirements	Documented training for all employees on green cleaning procedures. Additional annual training
Communications	Identifying "vulnerable populations" that may be effected by cleaning activities. Feedback mechanisms.

Additional requirements included as part of the communications focal point is to maintain and track chemical inventories stored onsite and reporting of chemical usage, usually on a quarterly basis. Cleaning equipment used onsite; repair and maintenance logs are also required.

Detailed standard operating procedures that address each of the green cleaning focal points will be a giant step forward toward implementing the program.

What About Products?

When it comes time to select cleaning products, you should work with a reputable manufacturer that can provide high quality green products for all cleaning and floor care functions. Relying on the manufacturer and/or their distributors for guidance on implementing a green cleaning program with their products is even more important. Some manufacturers offer detailed procedures and other useful tools to make the transition to green cleaning easier at the operational level, often at little or no cost.

Conclusion

Is it all worth it? You will have to be the judge. But, make no mistake, green cleaning is a bonified trend that is here to stay. A great opportunity lays waiting for Building Service Contractors that want to grow their business with higher profit, value added green cleaning services.