

[Green cleaning meaning](#)

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Sustainability Desk

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Most of us spend up to 90 percent of our lives indoors. It's no surprise then that amid growing concerns about indoor air quality, chemical sensitivities and the variety of potentially harmful substances found in the modern workplace, the use of environmentally safe cleaning products and practices is catching on.

For health reasons alone, green cleaning makes sense. But did you know that it's also possible to earn more than 20 percent of the credits necessary for LEED-EB (Existing Buildings) certification by adopting a formalized, documented Green Cleaning program?

There are five basic steps to implementing Green Cleaning in your workplace:

Step One: Get stakeholders on board. Be prepared to define Green Cleaning, including the benefits of healthier indoor air quality for building occupants and those using the products. Discuss the marketing opportunities the program can help create and the reduced health risks that can result from non-toxic cleaning supplies and practices.

Build your own Green Team that includes members from different departments within your organization as well as representatives of any outsourced services such as landscaping, pest management, food service and waste removal. For K-12 schools, team members could also include a school nurse, teachers, principals, superintendent, parents and students. Healthcare facilities should also include someone from infectious disease control. To further drive your success, find the passionate people in your organization to be part of your team.

Step Two: Establish your baseline and build a plan. Conduct a survey of the products and procedures you're currently using, and identify the sustainability of these products (i.e., are the chemicals Green Seal certified, do the paper products meet EPA guidelines for recycled content, etc.?). This will assist you in identifying opportunities for change as well as data to measure your

accomplishments. Establish a road map that identifies where you want to go with your program and set realistic timelines and work within budgets.

Step Three: Develop your procedures and training plan. Green Cleaning procedures are not much different than traditional procedures, however, they should focus on reducing exposures to harmful contaminants, minimizing waste and environmental impacts, and making processes more efficient. Your custodial team needs to be trained on all procedures and monitored occasionally. Keep records of training events. Conduct an analysis of the areas where your custodial supplies are kept. Closets should be clean, organized, well-lit and well ventilated. It's also important to identify people in the building with allergies and other sensitivities and those suffering through a seasonal virus or other illness who work in areas where special procedures and products are used.

Step Four: Build Your Toolbox. Choosing the right products is a must for a Green Cleaning program and to maximize potential credits for LEED-EB. Your program components should consist of entryway matting systems, paper products, trash can liners, skin care products and cleaning agents. Other helpful resources should include the LEED-EB Reference Guide and checklist, a green audit survey and training documentation. Additionally, consider creating a list of resources and reference tools to help educate the building's custodial staff and others.

Step Five: Create a Communication and Stewardship Plan. Your communication plan can help manage expectations as well as share successes. Let building occupants know what's happening, when, what to expect and what their role might entail. Communication should begin with the program's implementation (but don't forget Step One and make sure you get key stakeholders on board early). Occupants should be notified in advance of major events such as carpet cleaning or pesticide applications.

Now let's ask one of the more obvious questions: Does a Green Cleaning program cost more? The short answer is that going green is not designed to reduce the cost of your current cleaning program, although it can help. Rather, Green Cleaning brings value to an organization by contributing to a healthier environment. It should also earn respect for those who are driving the effort.

If that's not sufficient, here are several examples of cost savings that can be experienced by implementing Green Cleaning:

- Reduced turnover with the custodial staff, which reduces training and hiring costs.
- Elimination of corrosive chemicals that damage restroom fixtures – not to mention related human health issues.
- Lower cleaning equipment replacement costs through the purchase of better-made products.
- Reduced environmentally related complaints from building occupants.

Implementing a Green Cleaning program is an ongoing journey, and cleaning technology will continue to evolve. Fortunately, you don't have to go down this road alone. Tap into your suppliers for help in creating your green team.

The U.S. Green Building Council is the nation's foremost coalition of leaders from across the building industry working to promote buildings that are environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work. The West Michigan Chapter provides and develops leadership through strategic affiliations and comprehensive educational opportunities at all levels. Please send comments and column proposals to chuck.otto@haworth.com.