

Thinking of taking your facility "green" ?

Like it or not the green tidal wave is upon us. It seems as if everyday the front page of the paper or parts of a newscast carry a story about how the "green revolution" is changing the way we produce things or live our lives. Almost every television ad that is not for car insurance or pharmaceutical products is telling you just how green their business or product is now. If you are thinking about changes you might make to your facility this article can help you decide if making a move in that direction is for you. The next few articles will cover the costs, process, and limitations of making a change to the green.

Many people are rightly concerned over the impact traditional cleaning chemicals have on their health while they are at work. Dr. James Piper, a facilities consultant, states that 8 billion pounds of chemicals and 4.5 billion pounds of paper are used by cleaning professionals and suppliers every year. That's billion. Also, of the over 100,000 cleaning chemicals registered with the EPA few have EVER been studied closely on how they affect us and our work environment. Many of us never gave a thought to what the exposure to Isopropyl Alcohol, Glycol Ether, and Phthalates could have on us. Sound familiar? It's glass cleaner and all of those chemicals are considered toxic to humans and the environment. Yikes!

It may seem that to launch a clean green program all we need to do is change our chemicals but using sustainable practices means a lot more. A product must not only be non-toxic to us but must also not be over-used or poorly shipped. That is good because it gives us options! For an example, let's use the glass cleaner. We may decide to not stop using glass cleaner but we can change the practice of using four or five squirts when one will do. We can choose to use a glass cleaner that comes concentrated so that we add the water at the facility rather than ship that water all the way from the factory. Easy!

Another way to go green without changing too much is to stop dirt from coming inside the building so that less chemicals and equipment will be needed to remove it. Most buildings get a nightly janitorial cleaning but very few have the exterior entrances and exits cleaned with such rigor. LEED certified structures require that a water spigot and electrical outlet be located at each entrance and exit. By washing off the walkways to and from the facility every night and having 12 to 15 feet of matting you can greatly reduce (some say as high as 90%) most of the contaminates and dirt from entering the building. Again-Easy!

What about those 4.5 billion pounds of paper. The EPA has had standards that must be met for the recycled content in paper but they are low. With a little help and some flexibility on proprietary products we can raise our recycled content to 80% or 100%. There should be very little or no cost difference in making this adjustment. Might even save a little! Just ask your supplier for details and make sure they give you a variety of brands and prices. Generally, the brands with the most name recognition tend to charge a lot more for the higher recycled content. What a surprise!

There is a lot to think about when considering if it is time to make your building "Green".

The above steps list a few easy things you can do yourself with little cost. Next month, we will consider some slightly more invasive changes we can plan on making and the importance of getting everyone to buy into our new program. If you have further questions on the availability of green cleaning products, a guide through the alphabet soup of programs and certifications, or other suggestions on how to get started please feel free to give us a call and we will be happy to go on a walk through of your facility and offer training on how to launch a Clean-Green program at your location.