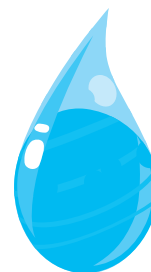


MOVE TO GREEN!

A Green Cleaning Fact Sheet for Florida Schools

Green cleaning products protect health and the environment and dramatically reduce risks associated with conventional cleaning agents. In Florida, approximately four million children and staff^{1,2} spend their days in schools. Many of them are unnecessarily and routinely exposed to chemicals that have evaporated into indoor air or that have been left behind as a residue and are absorbed by the skin of anyone who touches it. These residues can then be ingested when young children place their fingers in their mouths.



Health risks posed by chemical cleaners could be avoided simply by switching to green cleaners. By reassessing cleaning practices and products and changing purchasing choices, you can help protect the health of our state's most valuable resource, young people, as well as our valuable natural resources. It may take a few tries to come up with the best solutions, but industrial staff who use green cleaners have found them to be effective and competitively priced. Across the country, schools are making the move to green. Your efforts can help Florida lead the way.

What is green cleaning?

Green Cleaning is defined as cleaning practices that protect health without harming the environment. Green cleaning products are typically biodegradable, non-toxic and do not accumulate in living tissue. Green cleaning practices can reduce risks to health, safety and the environment. They prevent pollution and can even save money when compared to traditional chemical cleaners.

Why use green cleaners?

Green cleaners:

- Improve indoor air quality.
- Minimize health risks to children, janitors and administrative staff.
- Protect local air and water quality.

Chemical based cleaners can substantially increase indoor air pollution levels causing headaches, asthma, burns and eye damage. Many have ingredients that have been shown to cause cancer or to damage the lungs, liver, kidneys or stomach.³ Through disposal, spills and evaporation these chemicals enter the air we breathe and find their way into our water and land. Many can be toxic to humans, fish and other animals.



What to look for...

Check labels carefully. Many products claim to be “green” but may not be. First, look for the following labels that help identify green cleaners:

- Non-toxic
- Biodegradable (can be broken down by microorganisms without harming the environment)
- Petroleum-free
- Bleach-free
- Phosphate-free
- Contains no dyes, chlorine, or hypochlorite
- Recycled content containers
- Concentrated and in bulk packaging (rather than ready to use)
- Natural fragrances

Avoid hazardous exposure...

On average, a school custodian uses 28 gallons of chemicals each year, and roughly half of these contain hazardous ingredients⁴ that contribute to the workers’ high rate of injury. Products to avoid are generally ones that:

- are corrosive to the eyes and skin (e.g., acid toilet bowl cleaner, floor finish stripper, concentrated disinfectant).
- are flammable (e.g., aerosol deodorant; chewing gum freezer spray; metal polish).
- give off toxic fumes (e.g., dust mop spray, metal polish, graffiti remover).
- are absorbed through skin (e.g., metal polish, graffiti remover, heavy-duty degreasers).⁵

Assistance with identifying green cleaners

For questions about a specific product, download a Materials Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) from a supplier’s Web site or check with independent certifiers such as Green Seal or EcoLogo.

What to do with old cleaners

Never pour them down the drain or throw them in the trash. Consider using up your old cleaners and replacing them with greener products. Unusable chemicals should be disposed according to a school’s hazardous waste pickup contract or policy.

What is Pollution Prevention (P2)?

When you eliminate or reduce hazardous or toxic waste byproducts of any activity, you are practicing pollution prevention. P2 alternatives can increase profitability, protect health and safety, and improve the environment.

Florida’s *Pollution Prevention* Program offers no cost, non-enforcement technical assistance to businesses, schools, and governments. P2 program recommendations minimize hazardous waste and toxic emissions generated throughout Florida.

Visit www.dep.state.fl.us/pollutionprevention for additional information.

¹ Green Schools Initiative, *Executive Summary* 02(2005). 14 Aug 2008 <<http://www.greenschools.net/execsummary.pdf>>.

² US Census Bureau, *State and County Quickfacts 2006 Population Estimate (extrapolated)*. 14 Aug 2008 <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12000.html>>.

³ US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), *Actions to Improve Indoor Air Quality* 07(2005). 15 Aug 2008 <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/actions_to_improve_iaq.html>.

⁴ USEPA Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project, *Be Healthy, Clean Safely* 04(2000) 4.5. 14 Aug 2008. <http://www.epa.gov/region09/waste/p2/richmond_report.pdf>.

⁵ *Ibid.*