

# Real Estate Journal

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## Being green is not just a trend: Facility maintenance using green cleaning methods



Ed Sisk - XL North

You can't go far without hearing the word green. Everyone wants us to be green. From politicians to environmental activists to even your neighbors and customers, being green is not only a trend, but a worthwhile change in the way we do many things. If you haven't already started to think green, now is the time. It's the right thing to do.

Cleaning and maintaining a commercial building with green practices is becoming more popular and even more important. With many of us thinking green, tenants may start to demand that a building is not only built using green methods but kept green by environmentally friendly cleaning methods.

Being green, loosely defined is creating circumstances that help minimize the negative effects to the environment. For the purposes of our discussion, we are talking about the indoor environment. It is said that people spend an average of 90 percent of their lives indoors so it is critical that building owners and managers create an environment that is clean and healthy for tenants and all that visit your building.

The first step in greening up your building is to make an initial assessment of cleaning procedures and the products used in the maintenance of the building. Take an inventory of all products used and if they are created to be safe for the environment. Many cleaning products use many forms of carcinogens. Cleaning products should be free from carcinogens and should be mostly organic and environmentally friendly. They should also be fragrance-free. Certain fragrances can irritate people and cause some people to have reactions. The products should be low in Volatile Organic Compounds or (VOCs.) If you're not sure about the technical side of this, just inquire with the manufacturer. They'll know exactly what you're asking them.

**Making the case for green cleaning:**

Carcinogens and VOC's are know to cause a variety of issues including, everything from headaches, nausea, rashes, nose irritation and many other unwanted side effects.

They've also been known to contribute to various health issues such as birth defects, neurological disorders, asthma and other lung damage. And that's not just for your tenants. Keep the users of these products in mind as well such as your janitorial staff. Accidents using harsh chemicals can lead to skin damage, blindness and other serious injuries not only resulting in personal injury, but costly claims to the building owner.

Floor surfaces account for a majority of the cleaning in a building. Start by making sure there are area rugs at each entryway into the building. This may sound simple, but by doing this, you can help minimize the amount of dirt that already comes into the building. And yes, that's a pretty straightforward solution to a bigger problem.

When choosing products to clean floors such as tile, wood and carpet, utilize products that are low or free from ingredients such as zinc and other harmful metals as well as ammonia and any other form of ammonia. Floor strippers and waxing products are ultimately the root of many complaints. Make sure the products being used are free from ozone depleting chemicals and have a low VOC content. Consider hiring carpet cleaning companies that use a dry cleaning method as opposed to the traditional wet cleaning method. The wet cleaning method of cleaning a carpet can take many hours if not an entire day to dry. By adding moisture to the rug, it can also create an environment for mold to grow and cause a musty odor after the process. You can also avert mold by treating carpets and other fabric surfaces such as furniture and fabric wall surfaces with a mold preventative.

Two other major contributors of sick buildings include dust and water. Consider using vacuuming instead of traditional dusting. Traditional dusting leaves dust behind. That dust will be a factor to lower air quality. It can also make heating and cooling systems work harder by creating more dust in the air and it can cause those systems to have to be cleaned more often.

Water and moisture that comes into a building can contribute greatly to the growth and spreading of mold. Molds can then initiate asthma symptoms, allergies and can be a major factor in sick building syndrome. Mold does make individuals very ill and should be taken care of immediately. Inspect the building on a regular basis to ensure there are no outside sources of water intrusion including the roof and all parts of the exterior.

Follow these few simple ideas and you'll be on your way to a greener building. And if you retain a cleaning service for your entire building, insist they use safe and environmentally friendly products in your building.

Ed Sisk is president of XL North, Fall River, Mass.