

Making Green Cleaning Easy for Local School Boards



Ten or even five years ago, it would have been a major undertaking for a school district to convert to a comprehensive green cleaning program. At that time there was little precedence and no “roadmaps” for doing so. Thus schools faced numerous challenges that included:

- ◆ what defined a green cleaning product;
- ◆ should a comprehensive program focus on just cleaning chemicals or did it include other products such as sanitary paper and cleaning equipment;
- ◆ whether or not green cleaning products would meet performance requirements;
- ◆ would the products be cost competitive with those already being used.

Other challenges included the commitment (and cost) of training custodians, whether or not unions would be supportive of such a change, how parents, teachers, staff and other interested stakeholders might react to the possible suggestion that a school was switching to “safer” products potentially suggesting that the previous products were “unsafe” and have been placing students and other occupants at risk, availability of supply, and more.

by Stephen Ashkin

Often these challenges made the decision to convert to a green cleaning program difficult. This was because school boards were dealing with major cuts in budgets, student educational issues, meeting state and federal requirements, and more. Thus, changing the cleaning program often was such a low priority that it typically failed to get the necessary time and attention necessary to drive change.

However, today, while both state and local boards of education still find resources to be at a premium, advances by the cleaning industry have made it easy for school districts of all sizes to adopt a comprehensive green cleaning program.

Today's Opportunities for Green Cleaning in Schools

What boards of education across the country have found is that there are now well-conceived and respected national green cleaning programs that make it easy to identify the components of a comprehensive green cleaning program, and to meet the cost, performance, legal, political, and other needs of school systems. These programs include:

- ◆ U.S. Green Building Council's *Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance Rating System* (LEED-EBOM);
- ◆ Healthy Schools Campaign's *Quick & Easy Guide to Green Cleaning in Schools*;
- ◆ International Sanitary Supply Association's *Cleaning Industry Management Standard for Green Buildings* (ISSA's CIMS-GB); and
- ◆ Green Seal's *Standard for Commercial and Institutional Cleaning Services* (GS-42).

Using such resources, school systems can easily identify the components of a comprehensive green cleaning program.

In addition to these comprehensive programs, there are reliable, independent, and respected nonprofit organizations that offer valuable support relative to developing policies, procurement documents, training, and other needs. These organizations include:

- ◆ Green Cleaning Network;
- ◆ Responsible Purchasing Network; and
- ◆ Environmental Law Institute.

The existence of both the actual program frameworks or "roadmaps," along with technical and other support that can be used by school systems across the country, should give policymakers confidence that green cleaning programs are solid, making it easier for them to adopt similar practices.

Why the Need for a District-Wide Green Cleaning Policy

Today the major barrier to introducing a comprehensive green cleaning program is simply the need to overcome the status quo. School administrators and staff at all levels are busy, and without a specific directive from the state and/or local board of education, implementing a comprehensive green cleaning program often doesn't have enough support to move forward.

What the District Needs to Include in a Green Cleaning Policy

According to the Healthy Schools Campaign's *Quick & Easy Guide to Green Cleaning in Schools*, the green cleaning policy expresses the administration's support for green cleaning

and formalizes the commitment of time and resources for implementing the green cleaning plan. It also ensures that all school stakeholders understand their role in the green cleaning program and live up to their responsibilities for carrying it out.

A green cleaning policy should state the administration's intent to implement the green cleaning plan developed by a "Green Team." It should provide brief guidance on what specifically is expected—for example, incorporation of existing cleaning services into a green cleaning program and the education and involvement of staff, students, custodians, service providers, parent groups, and other organizations that use or impact the school.

Some key components a policy might include are:

- ◆ statement of the reason the policy is being implemented;
- ◆ definition of the key terms (such as green and green cleaning);
- ◆ role of the Green Team in terms of its key goals and responsibilities;
- ◆ key expectations (reporting spills, keeping personal space free of clutter, etc.);
- ◆ inappropriate activities (for example, bringing cleaning supplies from home);
- ◆ Purchase decision guidelines (for example, specifying approved products and vendors);
- ◆ education and communication (including to whom will the policy be communicated and who will need training); and
- ◆ Record keeping requirements in order to track progress.

Building Support

By creating a Green Team, a school board can start the process of building support for the policy among key school stakeholders. It may now be necessary to cast a wider net to reach groups that weren't involved in the planning, but whose support will be important for adoption of the policy and implementation of the plan. Some of these might include:

- ◆ student representatives,
- ◆ parent teacher organizations,
- ◆ custodial and teachers' unions,
- ◆ bus drivers,
- ◆ HVAC contractors,
- ◆ elevator service companies,
- ◆ other repair personnel,
- ◆ vendors of cleaning products, and
- ◆ community, student, and environmental activists.

It is also important to include the Health, Life, and Safety Committee or other existing related groups if they haven't been involved in planning to date.

Examples of Existing Green Cleaning Policies for School Districts

To help local school boards develop a comprehensive green cleaning policy—or to help states develop a model policy for districts—three examples are included below that can be considered and modified for use. These examples represent the policies developed and passed by the Chicago Public Schools, Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools, and Boston Public Schools.

Chicago Public Schools Green Cleaning Policy (section 410.8)¹

The purpose of this policy is to encourage and promote the principles of green cleaning throughout the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

The Board seeks to encourage and support efforts to implement green cleaning, also known as healthy and high-performing cleaning (HHPC), throughout CPS. On June 10, 2004, the City of Chicago adopted a new set of environmentally sensitive standards for public buildings that will promote healthier indoor environments. Green cleaning promotes education and health by reducing student and school employee exposure to harmful chemicals, allergens, and contaminants. It also promotes the use of less toxic or non-toxic cleaners and the use of equipment that would reduce the need to use harsh, conventional chemicals. Through this policy, the Board recognizes that green cleaning is important to the health and safety of students and employees.

Policy Text

It shall be the policy of CPS to encourage the maintenance of clean, safe, and healthy schools through the elimination of contaminants that affect children and adult health, performance, and attendance and [through] the implementation of cleaning processes and products that protect health without harming the environment. Specifically, CPS will promote the use of a HHPC program based on:

- ◆ The City of Chicago standard for Healthy and High Performing Cleaning;
- ◆ The U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy &

Environmental Design—Existing Buildings Criteria; and

- ◆ ASTM's E-1971 Standard Guide on Stewardship for Cleaning Commercial and Institutional Buildings.

This policy promotes and encourages the use of green cleaning principles by schools, areas, and central office departments. Each principal and administrator, with his/her staff, will be encouraged to incorporate, where possible, green cleaning principles with assistance from the Departments of Operations and Specialized Services.

Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools, "Healthy, High-Performance Cleaning Program"²

Guiding Principles

1. **Every day, every student has the right to a healthy and safe school environment.** Every adult is accountable and personally responsible for protecting the health and safety of students. Every adult is expected to work collaboratively to sustain a healthy and safe environment by:
 - a. Recognizing the factors that contribute to an unhealthy environment
 - b. Knowing how what they do contributes to the environment (we must all be responsible for our impact on the environment)
 - c. Taking corrective actions and/or notifying appropriate staff necessary to restore the environment to healthy conditions

The Division of School Plant Operations (DSPO) will provide training and communicate with staff and community users to educate

them on the value of HHPC on the health and academic performance of students as well as the personal and environmental benefits of a successful program.

2. **Every employee has the right to work in a healthy and safe environment.** Workplace conditions are regularly evaluated to minimize worker/occupant exposure to harmful contaminants and cleaning residues. Systemic processes are in place to assure compliance with OSHA standards, safe operating procedures, and use of safe tools, equipment, and supplies. Proper procedures, potential hazards, and safety information are documented, clearly communicated to workers and readily available for review.
3. **What gets measured gets done.** The DSPO uses an automated inspection tool to evaluate and manage school facilities for key environmental, safety, and health issues. This tool is used to monitor and verify that HHPC standards are being maintained. Regular assessments of school facilities are performed to track and manage information on environmental conditions. Information from these assessments is used to ensure consistent application of the standards throughout the school and drive improvement.
4. **Effective cleaning that ensures consistent, thorough cleaning is achieved by applying systematic approaches to work planning and work flow, considering the entire school campus and programs including buildings, grounds and activities.** The DSPO staff use systematic work plans and

custodial and grounds equipment that minimize student exposure to noise, dust, cleaning residues and exhaust fumes. Specialized duties are assigned to each staff member so that the amount of time necessary to accomplish tasks is minimal, the quality of cleaning is consistent throughout the building and the potential for occupant exposure to adverse affects is limited.

5. **Effective management of the exterior environment is essential to ensure healthy conditions are sustained in the interior environment.** Minimize pollutants entering the building, while maximizing the amount of pollutants extracted.
6. **Healthy, High Performance Cleaning can be accomplished while the amount of chemicals used and moisture accumulated and/or released into the air is limited.**
7. **Emergency response plans ensure rapid restoration of areas affected by unsuspected incidents such as floods, spills, blood, etc.**
8. **Disposal of cleaning waste in environmentally safe ways preserve and protect the local ecology.**
9. **Regularly scheduled preventive maintenance on HVAC systems ensures healthy, indoor air quality, climate control and longevity of equipment.** The DSPO uses comprehensive building maintenance plans, employee training and quality assurance inspections to effectively operate and maintain mechanical systems.

10. **Together, we can make a difference.** Training, involvement of, and close collaboration with students, staff, and the community ensures sustainability of the HHPC Program.

Requirements

[Section C of this policy], Requirements and Product Recommendations, provides the details on how to implement this plan. Requirements for cleaning practices, including how cleaning products are to be stored, specific methods for cleaning (what is required and what is not allowed), a cleaning frequency schedule, custodial equipment operational standards and requirements for disposal and recycling are identified. Referenced standards that must be met when purchasing cleaning products, including a list of prohibited ingredients are provided. This also includes specific product recommendations that meet the required standards. Requirements for grounds care and mechanical systems operations are also identified. Finally, there are requirements for staff training.

Section D [of the policy] provides additional resources, including product manufacturers, and Section E is a glossary of terms used in the plan.

Boston Public Schools
Green Cleaning Policy³

Policy Statement

Boston Public Schools is deeply committed to maintaining a healthy, safe, and clean learning and work environment for all Boston Public Schools students, parents, and staff and all other visitors. By developing and implementing a comprehensive Green Cleaners Policy that adheres to

the same principles and philosophy as the City of Boston's Green Building Initiative, Boston Public Schools will provide and use more environmentally friendly effective cleaning products which will greatly help those with asthma and allergies.

Implementation Plan

To implement a comprehensive Green Cleaners Policy Boston Public Schools promises to do the following:

- ◆ Purchase and provide only “green” or environmentally friendly cleaning products. Vendors must provide proof that their products meet the criteria for Green Seal Approved GS37. These products are tested and certified by Green Seal and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs’ Environmentally Preferable Products Procurement Program (EPP). These products will include but not be limited the following cleaning compounds: glass cleaners, neutral cleaners and general purpose cleaners.
- ◆ Schedule floor stripping and waxing to non-occupied hours.
- ◆ Burnish floor surface where applicable to reduce the use of potentially irritating cleaning and stripping compounds.
- ◆ Phase out use of current cleaning supplies and use only Green Seal approved products (GS37).
- ◆ Install automatic mixing systems to ensure proper use (i.e., usage at appropriate strength) of cleaning compounds.
- ◆ Prohibit the purchasing of non-approved cleaners outside of the Boston Public Schools purchasing and supplies contract.


- ◆ Prohibit the use of non-approved cleaning compounds (mainly desktop cleaner) by non-custodial Boston Public School staff (teachers’ teachers’ assistants, etc.). School custodians will provide upon request to teachers and other BPS site staff, pre-labeled spray bottles of previously mixed cleaning compounds (desktop and glass cleaners) that meet the GS37 criteria.
- ◆ Train and update Boston Public Schools custodial staff on the Green Cleaners Policy including but not limited to hazard communications (Right to Know law, MSDS, etc.), worker safety and personal protective equipment use, safe and proper product and equipment use, etc.
- ◆ Restrict the use of disinfectants to cleaning potential food contact surfaces, and clean-up of sewage and bodily waste, etc. All disinfectants must be a EPA Registered disinfectant. The disinfectant should have a HMIS rating of 2 or less. Provide only premixed disinfectants to ensure proper use of product.

Board Policy to Drive Continual Improvement

While the previous examples of local school board policies on green cleaning are excellent beginning points, following are several recommendations for making policies even more effective.

1. Require ongoing reporting on product purchasing. Reporting should include both cost of green cleaning products purchased pursuant to the board’s policies and the percentage of “green”

purchases as a portion of total product purchases. Furthermore, it may be advantageous for the board to set purchasing goals for the district.

2. Require ongoing reporting on custodial training. Because cleaning is a “process,” it requires that the products are properly used to insure the goals of the policy are being met.
3. Establish a requirement to systematically evaluate new green cleaning technologies and processes. Manufacturers of institutional cleaning products, including chemicals, paper, equipment, tools, and other supplies, are rapidly improving their products, and many of these advances will reduce impacts on student and staff health, as well as the environment—and some new products and processes will reduce costs at the same time. 

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¹Chicago Public Schools Green Cleaning Policy, http://www.cps.edu/About_CPS/The_Board_of_Education/Documents/BoardActions/2005_09/05-0928-PO1.pdf.

²Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools, “Healthy, High Performance Cleaning Program,” <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/schoolplantops/PDF/HHPCPlan.pdf>.

³Boston (MA) Public Schools’ Green Cleaning Policy, http://www.masscosh.org/files/BPS_Cleaner_Policy.pdf.