



STATE GOVERNMENTS:

Promoting Green Cleaning in Schools

Introduction

Environmentally preferable products, sustainability, “green,” reducing your environmental footprint—have all become part of the everyday lexicon as schools, businesses, households, and the public sector have increasingly focused on strategies and tactics designed to reduce their impact on the environment and human health.

State governments have been leaders in this area by adopting policies and implementing programs intended to improve their environmental profile and otherwise enhance their sustainability objectives.

A key tactic in greening state government is the adoption of procurement policies that promote the purchase and use of products and services that have a reduced negative impact on the environment and human health when compared to their traditional counterparts. Collectively, state governments purchase billions of dollars of goods to support their

by **Bill Balek**



What Is Green Cleaning?

While it may seem like a simple question, asking “What is green cleaning?” is likely to elicit a variety of responses. Although many definitions have been suggested, a consistently applied, universal definition remains elusive. Further, many people no longer even refer to green cleaning, preferring the more nebulous concept of “sustainable cleaning.” Such an approach actually makes quite a bit of sense given green cleaning’s crucial role in an organization or facility’s sustainability efforts. That said, any attempt to define green cleaning should start with an understanding of sustainability as a whole and should incorporate the key elements—people, profit, and planet—often referred to as the “triple bottom line.”¹

Once we have a good understanding of the basic idea of sustainability, it is time to turn our attention to green cleaning as a concept. The most widely accepted definition of green cleaning comes from a 1998 Presidential Executive Order: “Cleaning to protect health without harming the environment.” The Order goes on to define green cleaning products as those that reduce health and environmental impacts compared with similar products used for the same purpose.

This definition certainly provides a good starting point, but its utility is limited. After all, a product or service may have less of an effect when compared with an alternative, but its overall impact may be undesirable and may actually conflict with a facility or organization’s sustainability goals. Further, it is important to keep in mind that the primary goal of a green cleaning program should be to reduce the impact of the cleaning process on the natural and built

environment without having a negative impact on human health.

This may seem like a simple concept, but closer examination reveals a complex notion, especially given the inherent function of the cleaning process—the removal of harmful contaminants resulting in a healthy indoor environment. Therefore, it is not enough to just use products, equipment, and materials that are the least harmful alternative. Rather, it must be clear that the products actually perform as expected and deliver a clean and healthy environment.

Given this reality, effective cleaning is obviously the foundation of a green cleaning program. After all, if a school facility is going to be green, by definition, it has to be healthy—and if a facility is going to be healthy, it has to be cleaned effectively!

So how does this help answer the question, “What is green cleaning?” If green cleaning is equated with providing a healthy environment and it is understood that a healthy environment is dependent on effective cleaning, a green cleaning program is truly best defined as one that has the least negative impact on human health and the natural environment while ensuring that the necessary level of unwanted and potentially harmful contaminants are removed as the result of effective cleaning. That said, schools need to take a fresh look at the cleaning process and consider a new approach. By focusing on the concept of cleaning for health, they can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and to providing a healthy, safe, and clean learning environment.

¹While no single meaning of sustainability satisfies everyone, the definition of sustainable development used by the 1987 Brundtland Commission of the United Nations is one of the most frequently cited: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

ongoing operations. Office paper, light bulbs, automobiles, furniture, and cleaning supplies are just a few examples of items regularly purchased by state governments.

By procuring and using environmentally preferable products and services, state governments have the perfect opportunity to substantially reduce the environmental impact of their own buildings and operations. Perhaps more importantly, in so doing states also demonstrate environmental leadership, increase public awareness of the benefits of buying green products, and encourage economic development of greener goods by fostering markets for environmentally preferable products.

Increasingly, state governments have identified green cleaning as a key strategy in achieving their sustainability objectives. As a result, 22 states have now adopted a green cleaning procurement policy of some kind. Historically, these state green cleaning laws and policies have focused on state agencies or state-owned buildings.

other states emulate those that have gone before them.

These laws and policies on green cleaning in schools share several features. For example, they recognize the importance of high performance cleaning as necessary to maintain a sanitary and healthy indoor environment that is important for students' short- and long-term health—and that is ultimately conducive to student performance. In fact, there is a growing body of evidence that shows a positive correlation between student academic performance and the state of “cleanliness” within the school facilities.

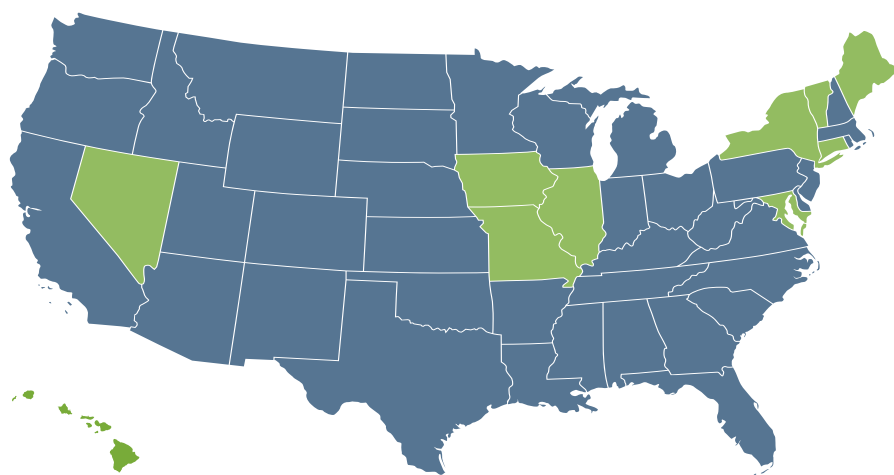
At the same time, state policies on green cleaning also recognize that we can perform highly effective cleaning that removes harmful microorganisms, infectious agents, allergens, and other deleterious substances in an environmentally benign manner given the new products, technologies and processes that are available today. Moreover, given the state of today's marketplace, schools can transition to a comprehensive green cleaning

program without adversely affecting their budgets. Indeed, many schools have experienced cost savings after switching over to an environmentally preferable cleaning program.

However, state policies vary considerably. Most laws require schools to use green cleaning products, but differ in how they establish criteria for meeting this requirement. Laws in New York and Illinois, for example, direct the state to adopt guidelines and specifications that schools must use in purchasing green cleaning products. In Connecticut and Iowa, such guidelines are not required, but schools must use products that meet third-party certification standards and/or are approved by the state. By contrast, Maryland law leaves it to each school district to adopt its own specifications for purchasing green cleaning products. Moreover, two state laws (Maine and Missouri) do not mandate green cleaning, but rather direct the state to develop *voluntary* green cleaning guidelines that school districts may elect to use.

Developments in State Green Cleaning Policies for Schools

During the last five years or so, states increasingly focused on implementing green cleaning in K-12 schools, primarily because the children who are in these buildings every day are an especially vulnerable population. Ten states plus the District of Columbia now require or encourage schools to adopt green cleaning programs, and that number will continue to grow as information about such policies and programs becomes more readily available and



Implementing Green Cleaning Programs in K-12 Schools

Connecticut • District of Columbia • Hawaii • Illinois • Iowa • Maine • Maryland • Missouri • Nevada • New York • Vermont

The remainder of this article provides a summary of the various approaches taken by states and provides more detail about this positive trend.

Summary of State Green Cleaning for Schools Laws

CONNECTICUT. The Connecticut law requires each local and regional board of education to implement a green cleaning program for all school buildings and facilities no later than July 1, 2011. The law defines a “green cleaning program” as the procurement and use of environmentally preferable cleaning products.

Connecticut defines “environmentally preferable cleaning products” as including, but not limited to, “general purpose cleaners, bathroom cleaners, carpet cleaners, glass cleaners, floor finishes, floor strippers, hand cleaners, and soaps” that meet the guidelines or environmental standards set by a national or international environmental certification program approved by the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services (DAS).

The law states that cleaning products should minimize to the extent possible the potential harm to human health and the environment, and prohibits the use of cleaning products unless the product meets a third-party certification standard that has been approved by DAS. An existing DAS policy (implementing a separate state law governing state-owned buildings) requires that only cleaning products certified by Green Seal or EcoLogo be used in state-owned buildings. DAS officials indicate that these certification systems are also approved for use by schools.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA. The D.C. Healthy Schools Act, which went into effect August 1, 2010, requires all public schools in the District of Columbia to use environmentally friendly cleaning products. The law also establishes an environmental programs office within D.C. government responsible for a range of other activities to promote healthy schools, including establishing an integrated pest management program and promoting EPA’s Tools for Schools program in public schools to reduce exposure to environmental factors that may aggravate asthma in children and adults.

Under the law, D.C. public schools are permitted to continue using conventional cleaning products until their existing supplies are exhausted.

HAWAII. The Hawaii Green Cleaning for Schools law, enacted in July 2009, calls for the state Department of Education to require all public school facilities to “give first preference, where feasible, to the purchase and use of environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products that have been approved by the Green Seal program...”

The state law limits the scope of cleaning products covered to the following:

- ▶ bathroom or restroom cleaners;
- ▶ carpet cleaners;
- ▶ general purpose cleaners;
- ▶ glass cleaners;
- ▶ hand cleaners and hand soaps;
- ▶ paper towels or other paper used for cleaning; and
- ▶ other categories as determined by the state department of health.

In addition, the Hawaii statute specifically excludes the following from the scope of the law’s coverage:

- ▶ products intended primarily to strip, polish, or wax floors;
- ▶ cleaners intended primarily to clean toilet bowls, dishes, laundry, upholstery, or wood; and
- ▶ toilet paper, facial tissue, or paper towels used for drying hands.

The measure requires the Hawaii Department of Health to maintain a list of products approved by Green Seal and it instructs public schools to use this list as a first-preference guideline when purchasing and using environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products.

The Department of Health is also required to “review and evaluate existing research regarding environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products, including any research and guidance issued by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.”

ILLINOIS. The Illinois Green Cleaning Schools Act requires all public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools with 50 or more students to “establish a green cleaning policy and exclusively purchase and use environmentally sensitive cleaning products.” Following are some of the law’s key features.

Guidelines. Under the Act, the Illinois Green Government Coordinating Council (IGGCC) is given primary responsibility to “establish and amend on an annual basis guidelines and specifications for environmentally sensitive cleaning products for use in school facilities.”

The IGGCC completed the guidelines in February 2008, which are posted at www.standingupforillinois.org/uploads/GreenCleanFinalGuidelines.pdf.

The Guidelines set a series of **mandatory** and **recommended** actions designed to give Illinois schools clear direction in purchasing and using green cleaning products as well as implementing a green cleaning program, as required by the Act. The mandatory provisions became effective May 9, 2008.

Mandatory Provisions. The mandatory provisions cover the following product categories:

- ▶ bathroom cleaners;
- ▶ carpet cleaners;
- ▶ general purpose and hard floor surface cleaners;
- ▶ glass, window and mirror cleaners;
- ▶ hand cleaners and hand soaps; and
- ▶ paper products.

In regard to the cleaning product formulations in the aforementioned categories, schools may comply with the Act by using products that are certified / recognized by:

- ▶ Green Seal;
- ▶ U.S. EPA Design for the Environment; and
- ▶ Environmental Choice EcoLogo Program.

For janitorial paper products, schools are deemed in compliance with the Illinois law if they use products that comply with the U.S. EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines for Commercial and Industrial Sanitary Tissue, or which are certified by Green Seal or EcoLogo.

If their products are not certified by these entities, companies may “self-certify” that their products meet or exceed the referenced eco-label program requirements.

Recommended Provisions. The Illinois Guidelines also set recommended or voluntary green cleaning procurement guidance and cleaning practices, which may be implemented individually or as a collective policy at the discretion of schools.

The recommendations address product categories such as air fresheners, bathroom and facial tissues, chrome cleaners and polishes, degreasers, disinfectants and sanitizers, floor care products, graffiti removers, and plastic bags. The recommended section also addresses powered cleaning equipment and provides “best practices” for implementing a green cleaning program.

IOWA. Iowa law directs all public school districts to conduct an evaluation and assessment regarding implementation of an environmentally preferable cleaning policy. Following the assessment, by July 1, 2012 all school districts are required to purchase only cleaning and maintenance products identified by the Iowa Department of Administrative Services (DAS) as environmentally preferable or products that meet nationally recognized standards. Similar to D.C., the law allows districts to deplete existing cleaning supplies and implement the new purchasing policy in the following year.

DAS must provide information on its website regarding environmentally preferable cleaning and maintenance

products to be used by school districts. The department is also authorized to provide information regarding other nationally recognized standards for cleaning and maintenance products. DAS posted on its website information about green cleaning and about third-party product certification programs, including links to organizations such as EcoLogo, Green Seal, the U.S. EPA’s Design for the Environment (DfE) program, and the Responsible Purchasing Network.

A school district may opt out of compliance with the green cleaning requirements with the affirmative vote of a majority of the members of the board of directors of the school district. Districts that opt out must notify the state Department of Education.

MAINE. Maine law requires the state to encourage schools to use environmentally preferable cleaners by compiling a list of cleaning products that have been certified as meeting “health-based criteria for safety and efficacy” by a third party independent agency such as Green Seal and to distribute that list to every school administrative unit in the state.

The state must also compile a list of disinfectants that have been evaluated using criteria established by the Division of Purchases or other acceptable criteria for environmentally preferred janitorial products and registered by the Board of Pesticides Control.

A complete list of green cleaners and disinfectants compiled by Maine is posted online at www.maine.gov/education/const/chem/green_cleaning_prod_list.xls. It is important to note that the list includes cleaning products certified by Green Seal and

EcoLogo, as well as those products recognized by the U.S. EPA Design for the Environment.

In addition, the state Department of Education is required to develop recommendations for cleaning procedures that will reduce the use of toxic chemicals and improve indoor air quality while meeting performance standards for cleanliness.

Maine aggregated these and other green cleaning resources online at www.maine.gov/education/const/chem/overview_green.htm.

The law does not require school districts to use green cleaning products, but rather requires the state to “promote the implementation of green cleaning programs in schools.” The law also requires the state to recognize school green cleaning programs by compiling and maintaining a list of school administrative units that have committed to using cleaning products and disinfectants that are included in lists developed by the state. The list is to be made available to the public.

MARYLAND. Maryland law requires the state’s K-12 public schools to procure and use green cleaning products effective October 9, 2009.

The law requires school districts to purchase green cleaning products for use in all public schools. The law defines “green cleaning products and supplies” as those that have “positive environmental attributes” such as:

- ▶ biodegradability;
- ▶ low toxicity;
- ▶ low VOC content;
- ▶ reduced packaging; and
- ▶ low life cycle energy use.

The law further requires county boards of education (school districts

are coterminous with counties in Maryland) to draft specifications that provide “clear and accurate descriptions of the functional characteristics or nature” of green cleaning products that will be bought and used by the schools. In drafting such specifications, the county boards of education must allow for “multiple avenues” in qualifying cleaning products as environmentally preferable including at the very least products recognized by the

- ▶ U.S. EPA Design for the Environment;
- ▶ EcoLogo; and/or
- ▶ Green Seal;

Maryland law allows schools to first use existing cleaning products and supplies before they transition to green cleaning products. In addition, schools may opt out of implementing a green cleaning program if it is not “economically feasible.” The law also specifically states that the green cleaning specifications to be issued by the county boards of education must not preclude the use of disinfectants or sanitizers.

MISSOURI. Missouri law requires the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to establish green cleaning guidelines and specifications for schools. While the law mandates the Department issue green cleaning guidelines, implementation by Missouri schools is voluntary.

The Missouri State Board of Education formally approved the State Green Cleaning Guidelines and Specifications for Schools on January 15, 2009. The Missouri guidelines are largely consistent with the green cleaning guidelines issued by Illinois,

the major difference being that participation in Missouri is voluntary, while Illinois schools are required to adopt green cleaning programs.

In all other respects, the Missouri guidelines are consistent with the green cleaning product procurement recommendations set forth in the Illinois guidelines. Of particular interest, both Missouri and Illinois reference Green Seal, the EPA Design for the Environment, and EcoLogo in regard to defining environmentally preferable bathroom cleaners, carpet cleaners, general purpose cleaners, glass cleaners and hand soaps.

In general, the guidelines provide a comprehensive approach to green cleaning, including recommendations related to the purchase of “environmentally sensitive” cleaning and maintenance products, janitorial paper supplies, and cleaning equipment. In addition, the guidelines provide specific best practices for implementation of a green cleaning program.

Missouri’s green cleaning guidelines are posted at www.issa.com/mogc.

NEVADA. Nevada took a decidedly different approach in its green cleaning for schools law. Effective July 1, 2010, Nevada law required all public K-12 schools to use environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products in the cleaning of all *floor surfaces* only—an apparent compromise made to obtain passage. However, the legislation does allow the board of trustees of a local school district to use environmentally sensitive cleaning products on surfaces other than just flooring.

Under Nevada law, the state Department of Education, in consultation with other stakeholders, including industry, is required to adopt regulations that set forth the “standards for environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products for use in the cleaning of all floor surfaces in the public schools.”

These regulations do not preclude the use of disinfectants and sanitizers when necessary to protect the health and welfare of students. In addition, the Department is required to provide each school district with a list of products that meet those environmental standards. A district can request permission to use a green cleaning product not on the state list if the product is more economically feasible and effective and complies with the general standards established by the state.

The Nevada law allows schools to opt out of implementing a green cleaning program for floor surfaces if it would place an undue economic burden on the school.

Each school district was required to prepare and submit to the Department of Education by January 2011 a written report regarding implementation of the law, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of the products used and a description of any requests for waivers. The Department was required to submit a written report to the state legislature summarizing the school district reports by February 2011.

NEW YORK. On August 23, 2005, New York became the first state to require the use of environmentally sensitive cleaning products in all elementary and secondary schools in the state.

The law authorizes the state Office of General Services (OGS) to work with the state Department of Education and the Departments of Health and Environmental Conservation to develop guidance for schools on the procurement and use of green cleaning products. The guidance was based on, but not limited to, guidance issued by the U.S. EPA and the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive.

The law applies to “elementary and secondary schools,” defined as a facility used for instruction of elementary or secondary students by:

- ▶ any school district, including a special act school district and a city school district in a city having a population of 125,000 inhabitants or more;
- ▶ a board of cooperative educational services;
- ▶ a charter school;
- ▶ an approved private school for the education of students with disabilities;
- ▶ a state supported school for the deaf or blind; and
- ▶ any other private or parochial elementary or secondary school.

The law became effective September 1, 2006.

Green Cleaning Guidelines. OGS issued guidelines for the procurement and use of green cleaning products by covered schools, which were revised in June 2010. Among other things, the guidelines address best cleaning management practices and also specify criteria to be used in the selection of green cleaning products. The following is an overview of the major product criteria addressed in the guidelines.

Scope of Products Covered. In general, the guidelines apply to only the following product categories:

- ▶ general purpose cleaners;
- ▶ bathroom cleaners;
- ▶ toilet bowl cleaners;
- ▶ carpet cleaners and spotter;
- ▶ glass, window, and mirror cleaners;
- ▶ hand soaps;
- ▶ floor finishes and strippers; and
- ▶ vacuum cleaners.

In reference to the above chemical cleaning products (except floor finishes and strippers), the products must be certified by Green Seal or EcoLogo. Vacuum cleaners must be certified by the Carpet and Rug Institute’s Seal of Approval program. Alternatively, companies may “self-certify” that their products meet or exceed the referenced eco-label program requirements.

In regard to floor finishes and strippers, the New York guidelines set forth specific performance requirements that must be met to be considered acceptable.

VERMONT. As the *Standard* was going to press, Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin signed a green cleaning schools law. More information can be found at <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2012/bills/Passed/S-092.pdf>.

Conclusion

In 2011, we witnessed a dramatic slowdown in green cleaning legislation at the state level, with no state enacting legislation of this nature in the past year. This situation does not represent a lack of interest in green cleaning, but rather reflects the fact that state legislatures around the

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nation have been consumed with more pressing budgetary and economic matters.

Given the dearth of action at the state level, this is an opportune time for school districts to move forward and implement green cleaning programs locally within their respective facilities. Guidelines issued by states such as Illinois, Missouri, and New York in support of their respective green cleaning for schools laws serve as a wonderful “roadmap” for schools in transitioning to a green cleaning platform. These state guidelines serve as a valuable resource by providing school districts with structured programs that have been proven in the field.

Moreover, there is ample evidence to suggest that transitioning to a green cleaning program can reduce costs associated with cleaning due to a reduction in inventory and waste, along with increased productivity. Coupled with anticipated environmental benefits, the case for environmentally preferable cleaning has never been stronger. 🌿

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