EXISTING AND EMERGING THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

When one considers the necessary elements of a green cleaning program, it is tough to know where to begin. After all, green cleaning has evolved considerably from the days when a program simply involved using a couple of "green" chemicals. Over the last several years, successful green cleaning programs have grown in sophistication and are now likely to include the use of environmentally preferable tools, chemicals, and equipment, as well as being built on a foundation of performance, process, and social considerations. Green cleaning has clearly grown up.

Yet, in many cases, the evolution of green cleaning has caused misunderstandings and marketplace confusion. Today's marketplace is inundated with products and services purporting to be "green" or environmentally preferable. This can create a serious challenge for school districts looking to implement a comprehensive green cleaning program that delivers a clean, healthy, and safe environment for students, staff members, guests, and the cleaning professionals who actually use the products. Simply stated, the proliferation in the availability of products and services claiming to offer an environmental benefit has made it difficult for purchasers to distinguish between those that are truly "green" and those that make false or misleading claims.

And make no mistake about it, misleading and false claims are a big problem. Most commonly referred to as "greenwashing," the practice of disingenuously spinning products and services as having an environmental benefit is a very real concern. In 2007, environmental marketing firm TerraChoice released a study titled "The Six Sins of Greenwashing." The study found that more than 99 percent of randomly surveyed products in North America were guilty of at least one of the greenwashing "sins," including:

- Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off
- Sin of No Proof
- Sin of Vagueness
- Sin of Irrelevance

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- Sin of Fibbing
- Sin of the Lesser of Two Evils

In 2009, TerraChoice updated the survey and added a seventh sin, the "Sin of Worshipping False Labels," specifically expressing concern over products and services that give the impression of having a third-party endorsement or certification, where none actually exists or where the "endorsement" is unreliable. The addition of the seventh sin was met with frustration by the end-user community, which increasingly relied on endorsements and certifications to identify products and services it could rely on. Yet users were now being told that such programs may be nothing more than another example of greenwashing.

The good news is that there *are* a number of programs a school district *can* rely on when developing and implementing a successful green cleaning program. Such programs offer tremendous benefit when identifying products for procurement and use and provide a level of assurance that the products meet specified "green" criteria. Several such programs are described below and have secured widespread recognition with government agencies, procurement professionals, and other end users. It is important to note that these programs share a number of common characteristics, including: certification or recognition is based on consensus-based criteria; the standard contains multiple attributes; and certification or recognition is granted through a transparent and robust assessment process.

Ultimately, third party certification programs can offer great value to school districts seeking to identify products and services that are truly "green." By lending a level of certainty to the procurement process, recognized and acceptable programs can help avoid greenwashing and ensure that school districts deliver a clean, healthy, and safe learning and teaching environment.

CHEMICAL PRODUCTS STANDARDS and CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

There are several dependable standards and certification programs that apply specifically to various chemical cleaning products. Highlighted by the "big three" (Green Seal, Ecologo, and EPA Design for the Environment), these chemical certification programs offer purchasers an immediate indication that a product meets published criteria. There are also a number of emerging programs to consider.

Green Seal (www.greenseal.org)

Green Seal describes itself as an "independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to safeguarding the environment and transforming the

marketplace by promoting the manufacture, purchase, and use of environmentally responsible products and services." Green Seal has long been recognized for its family of green chemical standards, including GS-37 (institutional and industrial chemical cleaners); GS-40 (floor care products); GS-41 (hand soaps, cleaners); GS-34 (degreasers); and the recently-released GS-53 (specialty cleaners). Products that meet the applicable standard can achieve certification by undergoing an evaluation that includes a review of the product's components and testing to ensure that it meets the criteria.

Perhaps the most well-known Green Seal chemical standard is GS-37, applying to institutional and industrial chemical cleaners, including general purpose, carpet, bathroom, glass, and toilet bowl cleaning products. Outlining a number of required environmental, health, and safety attributes, GS-37 is commonly referenced in state and other requirements. Certified products have been judged to meet the standard with regards to a number of attributes, including having demonstrated they are:

- non-corrosive, biodegradable, non-toxic, and non-combustible;
- contain a low VOC (volatile organic compound) concentration;
- are not a skin sensitizer; and
- perform as intended.

Certification applicants must also declare fragrances.

Green Seal's Institutional Floor Care Standard—GS-40—is also frequently referenced and applies to floor finishes and strippers. Among the attributes considered are whether the product is non-corrosive, non-toxic and non-flammable; whether it contains heavy metals and a high concentration of VOCs; and whether it meets performance requirements.

EcoLogo (www.ecologo.org)

Founded in 1988, the EcoLogo mark provides assurance that products and services meet stringent environmental standards that have been developed and vetted through a consensus-based process. The program is now managed by TerraChoice, a sustainability and marketing consultancy, and owned by Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (ULC).

Like Green Seal, the EcoLogo Program consists of a number of different standards for chemical cleaning products. EcoLogo is also frequently recognized by government purchasers, and EcoLogo certification is often specified in state regulations and in other procurement mandates. Among the most commonly referenced standards for chemical cleaning products: CCD-104 (hand cleaners and soaps); CCD-146 (hard surface cleaners); CCD-147 (floor care products); CCD-148 (carpet and upholstery cleaners); and CCD-110 (bio-based cleaning and degreasing). In order to achieve EcoLogo certification and display the mark, products are required to undergo an evaluation by an independent third-party auditor, who verifies whether the product meets the applicable criteria.

EPA Design for the Environment (DfE) (www.epa.gov/dfe)

The third of the "big three" programs is the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Design for the Environment (DfE). The DfE program essentially represents a partnership between the EPA and product manufacturers, who can earn the right to display the DfE logo on their products by meeting DfE's stringent human and environmental health criteria. Specifically, the DfE logo indicates that all of the product's ingredients have been screened by the DfE scientific review team for potential effects and that—based on available information, predictive models, and expert judgment—the ingredients and product as a whole pose the least concern when compared to others in its class. DfE is increasingly being included as an option in green cleaning procurement regulations and mandates.

The seminal DfE standard for green cleaning is the "Standard for Safer Cleaning Products," which sets forth the requirements products must meet to earn the DfE label. The standard applies to a multitude of products, including glass, bathroom, carpet cleaners, general purpose cleaners, and drain cleaners; floor care products; and graffiti removers. Unique in requiring that products list all non-trade secret ingredients on the label, the Standard also requires that pack-

aging meet minimum initial sustainability measures.

USDA BioPreferred Program and Biobased Label (www.biopreferred.gov)

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a labeling program that allows purchasers to easily identify products whose main ingredients are renewable plant or animal materials—more commonly known as "biobased."

Under the voluntary labeling program, manufacturers and distributors are able to certify that their product meets or exceeds an established level of biobased content for the particular product category under which the product falls. Products are then eligible to display the USDA Certified Biobased Product label.

It is important to note that just because a product contains Biobased-labeled material, it does not necessarily mean that it is green or environmentally preferable. That being said, many of the products that have been certified under the BioBased label program are also certified by Green Seal, EcoLogo, or DfE.

The biobased labeling program must be distinguished from the USDA's BioPreferred program. The BioPreferred program designates categories of biobased products that are required for purchase by federal agencies and their contractors, as well as the minimum biobased content that is required.

GREENGUARD (www.greenguard.org)

The GREENGUARD Environmental Institute's mission is to improve human health and the quality of life by enhancing indoor air quality and reducing exposure to chemical and pollutants. GREENGUARD, therefore, developed an indoor air quality standard for cleaning systems and products based on chemical emissions criteria. The program measures chemical off-gassing of products during recommended use and compares measured emissions levels against third-party risk exposure levels, including those established by the EPA and the World Health Organization. Products that meet or fall below the risk levels can be certified as "low emitting." Essentially, the GREENGUARD program is designed to measure the emissions that a cleaning worker will breathe when using a product.

The GREENGUARD program is not widely cited in procurement policies, but is becoming better recognized among the end-user community.

California Air Resources Board VOC Standard (www.arb.ca.gov/consprod/regs/regs.htm)

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) is the state regulatory agency responsible for providing clean air for all Californians. One way it does so is by establishing and enforcing volatile organic compound concentration limits for a variety of institutional and household cleaning products. While not specified in green cleaning procurement regulations or recommendations, the CARB VOC limits are mandatory in California and have been referenced in many other green cleaning standards. Further, several states have implemented their own VOC limits, although California's remain the most stringent.

Transpare™ (www.transpare.com)

While the existing third-party chemical cleaning certification programs are very beneficial in helping school districts choose products that meet published environmental preferability criteria, they do not allow for direct comparison of products and are based essentially on a pass-fail system. Thus, it can be very difficult for purchasers to identify products that meet their specific needs, have certain environmental attributes, and have the most desirable profile from a health, safety, and environmental standpoint. That is one of many reasons why ISSA—The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association—has partnered with Ecoform, a leading technical analysis company that focuses on the environmental performance of products, to develop Transpare, a web-based system that provides comprehensive and detailed information relating to a product's specific environmental, safety and health attributes.

By providing comprehensive information about products, Transpare offers school districts information they can use to directly compare and contrast "green" products, and select those that possess environmental and human health attributes that are particularly important to protecting children and which are otherwise consistent with a district's organizational sustainability goals. In effect, Transpare answers the question, "Yes, the product is certified as green, but exactly how green is it and how does it compare with competitive products?"

JANITORIAL PAPER PRODUCTS STANDARDS and CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

A comprehensive green cleaning program should also require that janitorial paper products meet applicable green criteria. This includes paper towels and napkins, facial and toilet tissue, hand towels, and wipes. Both Green Seal and EcoLogo have widely recognized standards for various categories of paper products and offer certification to those that meet the requirements. Green Seal's GS-01 Standard (sanitary paper products) applies to the categories referenced above, as well as toilet seat covers, tray liners and placemats. It is based on multiple attributes including: absorbency and post-consumer content; whether the product is processed chlorine free; and whether it contains additives that release carcinogens, mutagens or reproductive toxins.

Also based on multiple attributes is EcoLogo's family of janitorial paper standards, CCD-082, CCD-083, CCD-084, CCD-085 and CCD-086. In addition to many of the same criteria included in the Green Seal standard, the EcoLogo program also looks at resource and energy consumption; net solid waste; the toxicity of effluent; and whether the producer engages in sustainable forest practices.

A third resource that applies to janitorial paper products is the EPA's "Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines," which set forth levels of post-consumer content and pre-consumer waste for six product categories, including plastic trash liners. For example, the Guidelines have specified a post-consumer content level of 40% and a pre-consumer waste level of 40-100% for General Purpose Wipes.

Most government and other end user green cleaning requirements require that janitorial paper products be certified by either Green Seal or EcoLogo or meet the EPA Guidelines.

EQUIPMENT STANDARDS and CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

While there is only one major green certification program for cleaning equipment, recognized environmental preferability criteria has been published for various other types. In essence, a comprehensive green cleaning program should ensure equipment, including vacuum cleaners, carpet extractors, high-speed maintenance and propane-powered floor equipment, and automatic scrubbers comply with accepted criteria. Such criteria is often set in government regulations, procurement specifications or listed in a dependable green cleaning standard, such as ISSA's Cleaning Industry Management Standard – Green Buildings (CIMS-GB) or the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. That said, it is important to keep in mind the ultimate goal of sustainability when selecting and replacing equipment and make every effort to ensure that the school is not taking action that conflicts with environmental goals. For example, replacing equipment prior to the end of its usable life can result in unnecessary waste and other environmental implications.

Carpet & Rug Institute (www.carpet-rug.org)

The Carpet & Rug Institute (CRI) performs science-based research, customer advocacy, and environmental stewardship to serve its member organizations and serve as the voice of the carpet and rug industry. The Institute's Seal of Approval program tests vacuums, carpet extractors and carpet cleaning solutions against performance criteria to ensure that they are capable of effectively removing soil and clean carpet in order to protect a school's investment. Products that successfully demonstrate their capability to meet the performance criteria are awarded CRI Seal of Approval certification.

Additional Criteria for Equipment—CIMS-Green Building and LEED

While vacuum cleaners and carpet extractors are eligible for certification under the CRI Seal of Approval program, there is no green certification program for other types of equipment. Both the CIMS-GB and LEED standards set criteria to ensure that equipment is as environmentally preferable as practical. For example, both standards note that automatic scrubbers should be equipped with variable-speed feed pumps and either an on-board chemical metering system or a dilution control system for refilling, or use only water with no additional chemical products. Further, propane-powered floor equipment should have high efficiency, low-emission engines with catalytic converters that meet EPA or CARB standards. Both standards also set forth sound level limits

for propane-powered equipment, as well as high-speed floor maintenance equipment and vacuum cleaners.

CLEANING ORGANIZATIONS STANDARD and CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

The use of "green" chemical products, paper, and equipment is clearly a necessary component of a green cleaning program, but it is not enough to simply rely on the purchase and use of such products. Rather, it is equally important that actual cleaning services and the way they are delivered contribute to a school's overall green cleaning efforts. This includes ensuring the cleaning service professionals have been trained on the use of environmentally preferable products and the organization has a well defined green cleaning policy and is capable of delivering high performance, healthy service.

Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) & CIMS-Green Building Program (www.issa.com/cims)

ISSA – The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association – administers the Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) and CIMS-Green Building program. CIMS sets a management framework to help a cleaning service organization develop and maintain a quality, customer-focused and dependable cleaning operation, while CIMS-GB sets forth the key criteria of a green cleaning program. Organizations that meet the CIMS/CIMS-GB criteria can achieve certification by undergoing a comprehensive on-site assessment that includes review of all policies, procedures and systems, as well as visits to customer site accounts to ensure implementation in the field. All assessments are performed by an independent third-party to ensure compliance.

The CIMS/CIMS-GB program is premised on a belief that a successful green cleaning program is rooted in a foundation of effective management. For that reason, CIMS and CIMS-GB certified organizations must initially demonstrate compliance with the elements of CIMS' five sections of management best practices—elements that are based on universally accepted principles that have proven to be the hallmarks of success. The five sections of management best practices are: (1) Quality Systems; (2) Service Delivery; (3) Human Resources; (4) Health, Safety & Environmental Stewardship; and (5) Management Commitment.

Once an organization has demonstrated it has implemented an effective management system, it may then go on to establish compliance with the green cleaning requirements as set forth in GB. School districts that want to validate their green cleaning program or want to select a third-party provider capable of delivering a comprehensive green cleaning program should rely on CIMS-GB certification as a validation or prequalification/selection tool.

It is also worth noting that the CIMS-GB criteria are largely based on the green cleaning requirements in the LEED: EBOM standard, ensuring a school facility that its cleaning service provider can partner in the possible pursuit of LEED certification. A growing number of end users are now requiring that their cleaning service provider be CIMS-GB certified.

Green Seal's Environmental Standard for Cleaning Services

Green Seal has also established a certification program for cleaning service organizations. GS-42—the Environmental Standard for Cleaning Services—is focused exclusively on the delivery of green cleaning service and includes provisions relating to planning; the procurement and use of green products, supplies and equipment; cleaning procedures; communications; and employee training.

SUMMARY

There is no doubt that developing and implementing a true green cleaning program can be a challenging endeavor. The growing demand for sustainability and a better understanding of the crucial role that cleaning plays in ensuring a healthy, safe and "green" indoor environment has led to a proliferation of environmental claims that can be misleading, inaccurate or downright false. Fortunately, there are a number of reputable third-party standards and certification programs that offer great value as schools seek to ensure that the products and services they use are truly "green."

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