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## Be a Greener Cleaner

**Green cleaning isn't just good for the environment; it's good for your employees and tenants, too. Here are four steps for finding, choosing and using the best green cleaning products.**

By *Matt Alderton*



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The buildings at American University in Washington, D.C., are a special kind of clean. From the floors to the ceilings, the windows to the doors, they shine, sparkle and shimmer.

They don't just look clean, however. They really *are* clean, says Willy Suter, director of facilities management at AU. Last fall, the university implemented a green cleaning program as part of a campus-wide commitment to sustainability. In so doing, it made its buildings cleaner and healthier.

"With a green cleaning program, you're actually removing negative elements from your environment," Suter says. "That's what's different from a traditional cleaning program, where you're masking negative elements and moving them around, but not really removing them."

Although many cleaning products remove dirt, they often replace it with harmful chemicals. Green cleaning products, however, are designed to eliminate allergens and pollutants from the environment without introducing new ones into it.

For buildings that want to keep their facility clean, their employees healthy and their environment pure, green cleaning is a great option. To give a green makeover to your own cleaning products, equipment and staff, start with these four strategies:

### Look for the Green Seal

Since every green cleaning routine starts with green cleaning products, maintenance professionals should carefully inspect their cleaning supply inventory.

Replace harsh, corrosive chemicals such as bleach with products certified by Green Seal a Washington, D.C.-based organization that evaluates environmentally responsible products. "Green Seal tests for sustainability," says Matt Orem, a franchisee for Atlanta-based Maid Brigade, which in May 2007 became the first national housecleaning service to launch a green cleaning system. Green Seal's "Standard for Industrial and Institutional Cleaners"—also known as [GS-37](#)—includes a variety of [products](#) including [all-purpose](#), bathroom and glass cleaners.

Once more expensive and less effective than traditional cleaners, the green movement's popularity has made these products more affordable and powerful than ever.

However, not all types of cleaners include Green Seal-certified choices. Currently, there is no Green Seal category for disinfectants, sanitizers, air fresheners, laundry products, metal cleaners or furniture polishes, Suter says. When it comes to those products, he says, try to find alternatives; for instance, instead of bleach, use naturally occurring disinfectants such as hydrogen peroxide.

If you can't find an alternative, Suter suggests asking your chemical suppliers for recommendations. "Do your research," he says. "Sometimes, you have to be satisfied buying something that's the 'least bad.'"

### Dispose of Disposables

Although green cleaning begins with environmentally friendly chemicals, it doesn't stop there, says Suter. At AU, his staff also focuses on disposables, including toilet paper and paper towels. "We use 100 percent recycled paper products," he says. "There's no reason to use virgin paper."

Maid Brigade takes disposables a step further and reuses [spray bottles](#) on its sites, which keeps plastic out of local landfills.

### Educate Employees

More than earth friendly equipment, facilities need earth friendly people, Suter insists. "The one thing that the cleaning industry is blessed with is marvelous workers who want to do a terrific job," he says, adding that many people in the industry have preferences for certain cleaning methods and products. "You have to enable them to understand that your new, green approach is consistent with their dedication."

In other words, don't just give employees a new list of preferred products. Instead, train them on how to use them and show them why they're useful. "Communication helps," Suter says. "Employees need to understand the context for why this change is necessary. They need to see the bigger picture."

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