



six steps to green cleaning in healthcare facilities

By Chad MacDonald

The green, eco-friendly model has transformed from a movement on the margins to a true market force across a wide variety of industries. The healthcare industry is no exception. Sustainable building practices and LEED certifications are increasingly becoming the standard for the medical and healthcare industry. As the green movement gains widespread traction, healthcare decision makers are dealing with medical staff and patients that are demanding healthier environments in which to work and receive treatment. For healthcare administrators, adopting green practices is an essential step toward providing better care for patients, improving work environments for staff and reducing operational costs over the long-term life of the facility.

Green design and construction practices for healthcare facilities are more prevalent now than ever before. However, green cleaning is often overlooked as the logical counterpart to sustainable building. In healthcare environments, sustainable building and design practices are only one piece of the puzzle. Once design and construction is complete, the facility's maintenance practices must mirror the building process to optimize its overall effectiveness. After all, what

good is a sustainable building if it is maintained in an outdated and harmful way? This article will outline the steps healthcare administrators can take to implement a green cleaning program the right way.

Why clean green?

For the healthcare industry, altering cleaning practices is an extremely sensitive issue. With nearly 88,000 deaths caused every year by infections acquired in hospitals, infection control is of primary concern. Despite the high number of deaths caused by hospital born infections, staff and administrators are often resistant to changing established cleaning and maintenance practices. Extreme due diligence is required by healthcare decision-makers looking to adopt a new cleaning program. Research must be done, debate must occur and the implementation process must be painstakingly measured.

The first step is frequently the most difficult to take given the often overwhelming amount of information available from a variety of sources on green practices. The six tips that follow are designed to help healthcare industry decision-makers start the process of cleaning green.

1 Understand what it means to be green

In order to create a plan with reasonable and achievable goals, a healthcare decision-maker must truly understand what it means to be green. Going green is more than a marketing strategy; it is a real solution to real issues that can positively influence your facility's bottom line and the health of your staff and patients. Research must be done to gain an awareness of green marketing versus real green programs. Only then can you construct a plan with achievable goals that yield positive results.

2 Assemble a green cleaning committee

The success of your green cleaning initiative depends on participation from all staff levels from senior management to senior maintenance workers. Collaboration is the key to creating reasonable and achievable goals not only for the facility as a whole, but also for the various services offered to patients. Recruit senior-level committee members from a variety of disciplines. Certainly, cleaning the operating room is a 'different animal' than cleaning the waiting room and your committee members must bring their expertise and know-how to the table, to create accurate goals and practices specific to their department.

3 Seek third-party assessments of your goals and current cleaning practices

With the proliferation of green information has come an explosion in organizations offering green assessments and certifications. Your committee need not go it alone — do your research and find a third-party organization to evaluate your green cleaning goals and your current cleaning processes. Your team can do a good amount of assessment on their own, but it is always helpful to enlist expertise and alternate opinions outside of your staff to ensure success of your green initiative.

4 Dream big, start small

Once you have assessed your situation, consult with third-party green experts and establish your overall, big-picture goals. Then, take a step back. Diving in and going full bore toward reaching all of your green goals as quickly as possible is not always the best path. Enthusiasm is powerful if tempered by patience. Roll out your green cleaning program slowly and deliberately, starting with small and simple im-

provements that methodically build toward your larger, overall goals for the program. It is a fact that simple improvements yield big results not only for your bottom line, but also for your efforts to satisfy staff and patient requests to work and be cared for in a greener environment. If you commit to rolling out green cleaning practices on a regular basis, employees and patients will feel you are acting on their requests and they will not feel overwhelmed by sweeping changes implemented all at once.

5 Educate all staff members about green cleaning products and practices

Assess your staff's knowledge of green cleaning products and their uses. It is not enough for your green committee to be experts in green cleaning. This knowledge must be effectively imparted to all key staff members, top to bottom. Make sure all parties with a stake in the process understand how each product should be used in the right way to practice green cleaning. Simply providing green cleaning products is not enough; the people doing the cleaning and those working in other areas of this new environment must be taught how and in what situations green products should be used. Obviously, green cleaning cannot be performed without green cleaning products, but it is the combination of the right product with green-educated stakeholders that will engender the best results.

6 Create an internal communication plan for your green initiative

Educating your staff, contractors and patients about green products and practices will ensure proper implementation of your green cleaning program. However, a strong communication plan that emphasizes the benefits enjoyed by employees and patients from the green program is the key to long-term success of your initiative. Before you launch your green cleaning program, you will need to spend some time promoting your efforts and educating key participants in the program. The keys are to initiate the education process before the green cleaning program is implemented, and to have a plan to keep the green program top-of-mind over the course of time. ■

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