
Implementing Environmentally Preferable Cleaning Practices: An Eight Step Plan

Implementing a Cleaning for Health program improves indoor environmental quality and will significantly reduce the health and environmental impacts of the cleaning chemicals you use to maintain your facility. INFORM is available to help you through the process of changing products.

The following eight steps are essential to making this project successful, and INFORM can assist you with these steps by providing technical support and offering in-person meetings and trainings.

1. Adopt an environmentally preferable (EP) cleaning policy
2. Establish an Environmental Health and Safety Committee
3. Evaluate your current cleaning products, methods, and equipment
4. Design and implement a pilot project to test methods and products
5. Educate building occupants and custodial staff about the policy and pilot project
6. Phase in "green" products
7. Watch for new opportunities to make environmentally preferable purchasing changes
8. Reward the staff for participating

Adopt a policy.

Establish your priority—cleaning for health first—by adopting an EP cleaning practices policy. This tells the building occupants and staff that you value their health and safety and that you are willing to make changes to protect it. Tailor your policy to your organization's goals, which could be as simple as complying with legislation or pursuing broad environmental sustainability.

Establish an Environmental Health and Safety Committee.

Establish an Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) Committee that includes representative groups of people likely to be affected by the change, including the administration, custodial staff, building occupants, healthcare staff, and unions. Let the committee know that it will be responsible for representing its constituents and will need to raise concerns, answer questions, and otherwise participate in developing and implementing a successful "green" cleaning program. As committee members, participants will be involved in evaluating the efficacy of EP cleaning methods, how a change impacts their constituency, and the overall success of the project.

Evaluate current products and practices.

Audit products, equipment, and practices facility-wide to evaluate them from an environmental and human health standpoint. Identify which products contain hazardous substances and can be replaced by healthier alternatives. Examine processes and procedures, and determine where improvements can be made. Compare the ingredient lists of products to INFORM's "Ingredients Checklist" and share the list of hazardous substances and their associated health effects with the custodial staff.

Design a pilot project.

Select a location in the facility for a pilot project. Work with the EH&S Committee to select a location based on what you want to accomplish with the pilot: Do you want to clean only one of the most common interior finishes, see how the pilot works in a high traffic area, work with multiple finishes and products, or have the pilot program

encompass one building on a campus? Identify EP products that are likely to meet the needs of the facility, and begin a one- to three-month product test in the pilot project area. Try several different products to compare their performance, unless staff is committed to working with an existing vendor's product. Work with vendors of EP products to identify those that meet your facility's cleaning needs. Ask for product samples and equipment demonstrations. Arrange for training on the new products, procedures, and equipment.

Educate, educate, educate.

Have the EH&S Committee educate building occupants and custodial staff by disseminating information about why EP cleaning is important. Bring the EP cleaning policy to their attention, and let them know that the pilot testing of products and methods is underway. Support your efforts with signs posted throughout the facility describing the new policy and how building occupants can support it. (For example, ask building occupants to use products supplied by the facility instead of bringing in products from their homes.) Make sure that building occupants know who their representative is on the EH&S Committee so they can approach that person with comments and concerns.

Custodial staff should be educated about the health impacts of conventional products and trained in the use of the EP products.

Choose and phase in "green" products.

Have the EH&S Committee design an evaluation form it can use to rate the success of the products, practices, and project. Review the results of the evaluations, and identify the products that perform best in your facility. Phase in the use of the safer products. Start the phase-in by properly disposing of any chemicals the facility has in storage but isn't using. Use up stores of some of the most common chemicals before purchasing the EP alternatives. When equipment reaches the end of its useful life, replace it with the new generation of more effective equipment (like microfiber mops) designed to limit the amount of dirt being repositioned in the facility.

Monitor the project.

Review the project periodically to ensure its continued success, and assess new opportunities to expand the program. Ask product vendors to keep staff up to date on new products and procedure improvements. Work with INFORM staff to determine the amount of toxic chemicals avoided because of the switch to EP products.

Reward the custodial staff.

Making changes can be difficult. It is important to make the custodial staff part of the process and to reward them for their participation. Present certificates, give out "green team" tee shirts or hats, hold a special lunch, etc. Show them that you appreciate their help and willingness to implement the project.

For more information, contact

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For related information about green cleaning, see the following INFORM fact sheets: Cleaning for Health: Best Practices; Ingredients Checklist; Walk-Through Inspection Check List; Cleaning for School Health: Asthmagens in Institutional Cleaning Products; and Environmentally Preferable Cleaning Products: Sample Specifications.