

## **Step 4**

# Adopt Green Cleaning Training & Procedures

**5 Steps to Green Cleaning in Schools**

Green Clean Schools · [greencleanschools.org](http://greencleanschools.org)

When we talk about procedures, we mean how your staff is cleaning the school. This could include the way they operate machinery, the method they use to scrub floors and wipe surfaces, how often they clean bathrooms and the time of day they do their heaviest chores. The way your staff cleans should contribute to your green cleaning goals of healthier people and a healthier environment. A major component of your cleaning procedures is also training. You can purchase all the latest green products and technologies on the market but if your staff isn't trained properly, it won't matter.

As you begin to green your cleaning procedures, you'll want to consider how your procedures are helping to reduce general health risks and as well as environmental impact.

## Reduce General Health Impacts

A significant difference between a green cleaning program and a traditional program is the consideration to how your cleaning impacts occupant health. This means cleaning needs to have a focus on reducing exposures to potential germs or chemicals that can cause harm. Because of this, there are a number of areas where you should focus your training.

### **Control Infections**

Focus on cleaning things people touch, such as door knobs, light switches and tables. Encourage regular hand washing for all students and staff. Look to our [Infection Control](#) guide for more details on how to consider cleaning for infection control. When you use disinfectants, make them count. Be discerning about where you apply them, follow recommendations for dwell time and whether or not the surface must be cleaned before disinfecting.

### **Use Products Properly**

Minimize exposure to VOCs and other hazardous substances by applying furniture and metal polishes

to the cleaning cloth instead of the surface. This significantly reduces the amount of chemicals that get into the air and cause respiratory problems. Make disinfectant use count by being discerning about where you spray it. Unlike polish, disinfectants should be sprayed directly on surfaces to be effective.

### **Change Major Cleaning Times**

Highly susceptible individuals include those with asthma, allergies, chemical sensitivities or pregnant women. Making sure your cleaning procedures minimize potential exposures to these individuals is important. Schedule major operations including carpet cleaning or floor stripping early in a school break to increase opportunities for ventilation and reduce chemical exposure for building occupants. You can also clean earlier in the evening to allow VOCs or other irritants to dissipate before the next school day.

### **Review Products**

With new products always being introduced into the market, you should continually evaluate cleaning products for effectiveness and occupant reactions.

### **Communicate**

Explain what work is going to be done beforehand, especially for major projects or while using products with strong fragrances. If the work cannot be rescheduled or postponed, sensitive individuals may need to move to another area of the building or be excused.

## Reducing Environmental impact

Green cleaning is about both human health and about the health of the environment. Your procedures should take into account steps to reduce the overuse of chemicals, paper and plastic, and even reducing the need to clean at all.

### **Change Floor Care Procedures**

Finding ways to cut back on stripping and recoating

floors limits the amount of waste and effluent poured down the drain. By using entryway mats to reduce the amount of dirt that enters the building, you also reduce the need to scrub and recoat or strip and refinish floors. In addition, vacuuming hard floors helps to extend the life of floor finishes. Use metal-free and burnish-free floor finishes to reduce the dust and contaminants introduced into the air. Always look for processes that eliminate entire steps, such as longer lasting floor care systems that reduce the need to strip and refinish floors.

### **Be Careful When Using Disinfectants and Sanitizers**

Choose the most environmentally preferable EPA-registered disinfectants. Avoid the futile attempt to sterilize the entire school. Instead, focus on high-touch points.

### **Adopt Integrated Pest Management**

Pesticides affect the nervous system and can be toxic in the environment once disposed after use. Rather than spray pesticides on your grounds, eliminate the sources that attract the pests in the first place. This can be done by sealing cracks, repairing screens and making other improvements that keep pests out. Reduce clutter that shelters pests and improve cleaning procedures around food and beverage areas.

### **Recycle**

Help reduce reliance on virgin materials, lower overall impacts on animal habitats and landfills, and increase the value of recyclables by recycling and purchasing recycled materials. Many schools have found that they significantly reduce trash disposal costs when they start reducing their waste.

Be sure to read our resources on advanced cleaning procedures: [Infection Control](#), [Food Service](#), [Laundry](#) and [Integrated Pest Management](#).

## Third-Party Resources

Your school might also seek out a green cleaning guidance from third-party organizations to help assess and advise your cleaning procedures. Many respected organizations have developed a set of criteria to help schools develop their own green cleaning policies.

### **ASTM**

ASTM International has published steps for developing cleaning procedures. The Standard Guide for Stewardship for the Cleaning of Commercial and Institutional Buildings (Publication E1971-05) can be ordered at [astm.org](http://astm.org).

### **Carpet and Rug Institute**

The Carpet and Rug Institute offers environmentally sensitive guidelines for carpet cleaning and maintenance. There are certifications for products that take Indoor Air Quality into consideration as well as certifications for service providers that use approved products and techniques. Learn more at [carpet-rug.org](http://carpet-rug.org).

### **Green Seal**

Green Seal has developed its Standard on Commercial and Institutional Cleaning Services (GS-42) with guidelines and care third party certifications for hard floors. Green Seal's standard establishes requirements for cleaning service providers, including in-house and external cleaning services, to create a green cleaning program that protects human health and the environment for commercial, public and industrial buildings. Learn more at [greenseal.org](http://greenseal.org).

### **ISSA CIMS-GB**

ISSA has developed a green cleaning procedure certification called Cleaning Industry Management Standard - Green Building (CIMS-GB). It provides

a framework for cleaning programs to establish effective, environmentally preferable cleaning practices in addition to management best practices. CIMS-GB also has a training component that could be useful in teaching staff about new green practices. Learn more at [issa.com/cims-gb](https://issa.com/cims-gb).

### **ISSA Clean Standard: K-12 Schools**

This program establishes a framework to help schools objectively assess the effectiveness of the cleaning process at their facilities. Based on the philosophy of “Clean, Measure, Monitor” and an emphasis on high-performance cleaning, it is designed to ensure that schools are in a condition that is clean, safe and healthy for students and staff. Learn more at [issa.com/cleanstandard](https://issa.com/cleanstandard).

### **USGBC**

The US Green Building Council’s LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance (EBOM) requires using APPA’s Leadership in Educational Facilities Custodial Staffing Guidelines for Educational Facilities (available for purchase on the web) for an overall measure of the effectiveness of a cleaning program. Learn more at [usgbc.org/leed](https://usgbc.org/leed).

## Training

Introducing new products, equipment and cleaning procedures requires additional training and education to work safely and more efficiently. Staff should understand how proper training will protect them. While there are many training resources on the market, you can get started by looking to your distributor to provide training at no cost to your school.

You might also want to tap cleaning industry sources for training materials and programs. Trade associations and third-party certification organizations, distributors, brokers, manufacturers and consultants are all valuable resources. Consider training your workers to become green cleaning

specialists. Seminars are available that teach specialists to improve labor, speed and quality.

### **Evaluating Training Options**

Take the time to ensure the training program is appropriate for your situation and that it directly addresses your plans and priorities. Before starting the training process, consider inviting the school nurse to talk about the relationship between indoor air quality, children’s health and education.

Adults learn in a variety of ways. Some learn better through visual cues while others rely on verbal instruction. Most people learn through hands-on training. Make sure your training programs match your staff’s learning styles.

General questions to ask when evaluating training programs include:

- Does the training program accommodate non-English speaking staff?
- Are visual training methods available, such as color coding, icons and videos?
- Is a “Train the Trainer” program available?
- If the training program is offered by a manufacturer, is it updated to match new product introductions?
- Is the training comprehensive, or is it limited to a few products or tasks? Many activities within a school, such as cleaning restrooms or classrooms, require numerous steps. The best training addresses the entire process and provides assistance on staffing requirements, work loading, scheduling.
- Is the training product-specific, promoting only the manufacturer’s products, or is it more general? Either way can be useful.

### **Overcoming Resistance**

New training programs simply dropped on a custodial staff are typically viewed with skepticism

and apprehension. Regardless of how obvious the need for training may be to you, someone may be inconvenienced and could resist. Given the impact of budget cuts, hiring freezes, and other resource constraints, the green cleaning effort may be misconstrued as an attack on the custodians.

The key to overcoming resistance is frequent engagement with the cleaning staff from the very beginning. When people understand why something is being changed and how they may benefit, they become more likely to play a role in developing the program. Remember to:

- Make the training objectives clear
- Stress that it is not a condemnation of previous practices, but rather an effort to improve the health and well-being of students, teachers and custodial staff
- Find opportunities to create “heroes,” including workers who embrace the green cleaning program and those who complete training certifications, and publicize them within the school and, when possible, in the community.

## Get Started!

Now that you have the steps laid out before you, it's all about moving forward with your plan. [Contact us](#) at Healthy Schools Campaign to share your story, ask follow-up questions or find out how to connect with green cleaning leaders across the country. Our [newsletter](#) is a great way to stay on top of green cleaning trends and learn about what other schools are doing that really works. And now that you're preparing your green cleaning program, you'll want to prepare your school to apply for the [Green Cleaning Award for Schools & Universities](#).