



THEN and NOW

by Arely Castellón, LEED Green Associate

The Impact of Cleaning on Interior Maintenance

Thinking back on the cleaning many of us grew up with, it was the smell that indicated cleanliness. Today, things have changed because, as we know now, those smells come from chemicals associated with bleach, acids, ammonia, and other toxins that linger in the air we breathe. Cotton mops and rags were used for cleaning, which seemed appropriate at the time, but now we know that cotton only removes about 40 percent of the dust and bacteria when used for mopping or wiping purposes. Lastly, vacuum cleaners have always been used to remove debris from carpets, yet much of what was collected in the vacuum bags of the older technology vacuums was dispersed back into the air, causing it to settle into the carpet again. Yet, we thought things were clean!

Today, cleaning and maintenance options have never been greater and the objective of the cleaning industry has evolved into cleaning for health purposes. Sustainability has become an important consideration, so as to use resources in a manner that do not damage the environment or people, all of which translates into a cleaner and healthier building interior.

Cleaning for health purposes can be done by following a simple four-step program, which incorporates new and effective technology.

1. Use green cleaning chemicals with objective, third-party certification, which can provide proven, effective alternatives. Efficiency is also increased when used in combination with mops with built-in tanks or charger buckets.
2. Use microfiber cloths, mops, and wands, which can provide removal of greater than 98 percent of dirt and bacteria, essentially acting like a magnet.
3. Use HEPA filter vacuums, which can provide up to five levels of filtration, capturing 99.9 percent of particles as small as 0.5 micron, resulting in less dust throughout the facility.
4. Use entry mats (interior and exterior) that reduce the soil and dirt tracked into a building, capturing as much as 85–95 percent per the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI).

These interior maintenance and cleaning practices are not brand new. However, newer options are available every year in each of the four categories providing a wide selection of options, all of which improve building interiors.

Improved Health

Multiple studies document the reduction in occupant illness and sick days, given the more holistic approach to cleaning. Indoor air quality (IAQ) can yield positive results when measured prior to transitioning to sustainable cleaning and after its implementation. Studies also show that occupants, who suffer from upper respiratory infections, including allergies and asthma, benefit from the cleaner indoor air. Since the United States Green Building Council's (USGBC) data shows the average person spends up to 90 percent of their time indoors, the improved health aspect alone provides a compelling reason to implement sustainable cleaning.



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Operational Practices

When implementing sustainable cleaning, HVAC filters remain cleaner for a longer period of time. Whether it's the microfiber or the HEPA filter vacuums, dirt is being removed from surfaces and the air, increasing HVAC efficiency. Water conservation is a benefit as a result of using concentrated chemicals and more efficient cleaning tools. A traditional five gallon mop tank needs to be emptied and refilled every few thousand feet, yet newer systems with built-in tanks or charger mop buckets don't require gallons of water.

Life Extension of Floors

Machine scrubbing of tile floors is still done by some operators with an acid-based product in order to lift the imbedded dirt from the grout. Yet the reality is that the acid lifts and removes the grout, leaving it loose and sandy. Clearly, this process is not sustainable and the most effective products used today are based on an accelerated hydrogen peroxide, a natural whitener that does not damage grout. When marble floors are restored periodically, which requires significant time and expense, often overlooked is that a proper maintenance program will extend the shine and reduce frequency between the restorations. Undoubtedly, this is the preferred option, which happens to be also sustainable.

Restroom Care

It is said that restroom care and appearance is reflective of the overall building. Today's sustainable restroom products help create a positive perception. Automatic faucets, low-flush toilets and urinals, waterless urinals, hand dryers, and motion-activated light sensors

convey a message of concern for the environment and hygiene.

Aesthetics

A neat, clean appearance should equal a healthy environment and foster your building's reputation. Visitors take notice. It encourages tenants to lease and buyers to purchase, thereby enhancing asset value.

In summary, sustainable cleaning and maintenance processes are essential to an optimum building interior, resulting in visible cleanliness with no chemical odors. How does your building rate?

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