

Cleaning for Health in Our Schools



What are Green Cleaners?

Green Cleaners are environmentally safe cleaning products that can play a significant role in creating healthier schools with good indoor air quality. Green cleaners are less likely to contain toxic chemicals compared to regular cleaners. They are safer to clean with and work as well as other cleaners. They allow us to limit the use of more toxic cleaners .

Why use green cleaners in our Schools?

The facts:

- Some cleaning products cause or aggravate asthma.
- Asthma is the number one chronic illness of children attending Public Schools and the # 1 cause of childhood hospitalization in Boston
- We spend up to 90% of our time indoors where allergens and irritants can contribute to triggering asthma episodes.
- Many cleaning products require *extreme* care and protective equipment.

YOU CHOOSE!



Green cleaners	Regular Cleaners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluated and certified by Green Seal and Massachusetts Environmentally Preferable Products Program • Non-irritating • Are environmentally friendly • No strong fumes or perfumes • Safer to dispose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acids, caustics, solvents are common toxic ingredients • Some cause asthma • Can irritate nose, mouth, throat and lungs • Can damage organs and cause cancer • Can pollute water and air • Cause burns, rash or eye injuries if protective equipment is not worn

Do "green" cleaners kill germs?

General purpose "green" cleaners will remove dirt *and* most germs. Disinfectants have ingredients that destroy bacteria and germs. Because disinfectants can trigger asthma and cause other health problems, they should be used only when needed (bathrooms, cafeterias). Also - a disinfectant will kill germs best if applied *after* the area has already been cleaned.

Handwashing Kills Germs too!

Germs and infectious diseases are not just on surfaces in schools. They are also on us! Frequent handwashing will protect against germs that get picked up from other people, or from contaminated surfaces. Vandalism in bathrooms and lack of handwashing supplies keeps kids from using them. But not washing costs more because germs get spread and kids and school staff get sick!

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SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

For Custodians:

- ✓ Get training on safe work practices.
- ✓ Read the label and instructions. *Are there warnings? Do you need protective equipment?*
- ✓ Do not use the cleaner at full strength when it should be diluted with water.
- ✓ Never mix bleach and ammonia or bleach and an acid - it makes a poisonous gas!
- ✓ Do not mix different cleaning products together.
- ✓ Use different mops, rags, sponges for each product. *Is the equipment in good condition?*
- ✓ Clean in spaces with ventilation. *Can a window open? Can an exhaust fan clear the air?*
- ✓ If you have wheezing, chest tightness, cough or shortness of breath, you may have asthma; see your doctor. Talk to your Doctor about any health problems that don't seem normal.
- ✓ Request the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) for products you use. They have health and safety information.

Parents and School Staff:

- ✓ Do not bring in cleaning products from home - even if they say "safe" or "non-toxic" they can have toxic ingredients that can cause accidents and health problems in school.
- ✓ Use the school's approved cleaner if you want to clean something in the classroom.
- ✓ Talk to the custodian if there are strong odors from cleaners - or notify the Principal.
- ✓ Tell your Doctor about any health problems that don't seem normal. *Are symptoms worse during school than in the evening or on weekends?*
- ✓ Ask the school nurse to document symptoms that could be related to school cleaners.
- ✓ Every student with asthma should have an *Asthma Action Plan* on file with the school nurse. It is a form from your Doctor that has information specific to managing your child's asthma.
- ✓ Request the MSDS - if you need more information about the cleaning products.
- ✓ Meet together with others to form an Environmental Committee to address problems with indoor air quality or poor school conditions.

Start an Environmental Committee in your school!

An Environmental Committee includes the Principal, school staff and parents. The Boston Public Health Commission and the Boston Urban Asthma Coalition provide training on how to conduct a school audit and develop an action plan to address environmental problems. Problems they tackle include leaks, mold, poor ventilation, dust, pests and bathroom conditions. Environmental Committees are successful because they monitor the action plan to make sure that repairs happen, records are kept, and policies are followed.

For more information about green cleaners and Environmental Committees contact:

MassCOSH Healthy Schools Initiative: Tolle Graham at 617.825.7233 x19

Boston Urban Asthma Coalition: Jean Zotter at 617-279-2777

Boston Public Health Commission, Office of Environmental Health at 617-534-5965

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