



Questions and Answers About Green Cleaning

Q. *What exactly is green cleaning?*

A. There is no legal definition of “green,” and no restriction on the use of that term or others such as “natural,” “environmentally friendly,” “eco-friendly,” or “sustainable,” by manufacturers. A true “green cleaning” program refers to the use of products that use bio-based ingredients that have minimal impact on human health and the environment.

Q. *Do traditional petrochemical based cleaning products pose health risks for children?*

A. Yes. There is widespread consensus among pediatric environmental health experts that chronic, low level exposures to some of the chemicals commonly found in traditional petrochemical cleaning products pose a significant health risk to children. Exposure to these substances has been associated with an increased incidence of both acute and long term health problems, such as allergies, asthma, neurological problems, certain types of cancer, endocrine disruption, chemical sensitivity, and kidney or liver damage. See our science abstracts for more detailed information.

Q. *Are children more vulnerable than adults to these toxins?*

A. Yes. Children are at greater risk because of their rapidly developing physiology and their natural patterns of behavior. Children play on floors, sprawl on desk and table surfaces, and frequently engage in hand-to-mouth behavior. Pound for pound, children take in more contaminants than adults.

Additionally, most schools are cleaned daily, leaving behind fresh residues of cleaning chemicals on surfaces with which children come into direct contact. Some chemicals found in cleaning products (particularly solvents and fragrances) become airborne when used, and can trigger asthma attacks or other acute health problems in sensitive individuals.

Q. *Are there any standards for green cleaning products?*

A. There are several independent certifying organizations that have developed standards for green cleaning products including EcoLogo and GreenSeal. However, none of them are specifically designed to compensate for the unique vulnerability of children.

Using criteria originally developed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior, and in consultation with manufacturers, Grassroots has developed the ChildSafe Guidelines which provide the most stringent standards for green cleaning products in the nation.

The ChildSafe Guidelines take into account the myriad different situations and uses of products in schools, and strive to ensure that even when misused (or in case of a major spill) they will not present any risks to employees, staff or students.

We have also developed a list of products that meet or exceed these specifications. Please see our website (www.TheChildSafeSchool.org) for additional information.

Q. Are green cleaning products more expensive than traditional petrochemical products?

A. No. There are usually some initial costs for employee training and the installation of dispensing systems, and there may be costs associated with the disposal of toxic cleaning products currently in use, but the products themselves are not generally more expensive. Most districts find that the improved health (and attendance) of students, teachers and staff that can result from an effective green cleaning program makes such a program a good financial investment.

Q. Should our school district adopt a green cleaning policy even if our state has mandated green cleaning in schools?

A. Yes. States may be considering green cleaning legislation, but market protection laws in some states may prevent lawmakers from prohibiting the use of certain types of products. Thus, the most effective way to ensure an effective green cleaning program in schools is to adopt an official school policy mandating the exclusive use of bio-based cleaning products which are safe for children and the environment.

This document is part of **The ChildSafe School Program** created by Grassroots Environmental Education, a science-based non-profit organization.

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