



Q. What exactly is “green” cleaning?

A. “Green” cleaning generally refers to the use of products which have been developed using ingredients that have minimal impact on the environment and human health. However, there is no legal definition of “green” and no restriction on the use of the term by manufacturers.

Q. Do traditional 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 cleaning products pose a significant health risk to children. Exposure to these substances has been associated with an increased incidence of asthma, allergies, certain types of cancer, learning and behavioral disorders, endocrine disruption, chemical sensitivity and kidney or liver damage.

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 live in their environments in ways adults do not; they play on floors, sprawl on desk and table surfaces, and engage in hand-to-mouth behavior. Pound for pound, children take in more contaminants than adults.

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) linger in the air, 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 which have developed “green” standards, but to date, none of them recognize or

compensate for the unique vulnerability of children. In the meantime, we have developed the ChildSafe Guidelines and a product list to help decision makers and facilities directors find products which are safe for use in schools. The Guidelines and the product list are both available online at our website, www.grassrootsinfo.org.

Q. Are “green” cleaning products more expensive than traditional products?

A. 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 improved health of children, teachers and staff make a “green” cleaning program a good investment.

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

A. Yes. Many states are considering green cleaning legislation, but industry opposition may prevent lawmakers from prohibiting the use of certain types of products (New York State’s “Green Cleaning in Schools” regulations permit the continued use of products with strong fragrances and endocrine disrupting chemicals). The best way to ensure an effective green cleaning program is for school districts to adopt an official policy mandating the exclusive use of cleaning products which are safe for use in children’s environments.

This document is part of the ChildSafe School Program developed by Grassroots Environmental Education. © 2007. Permission to copy this document for educational and advocacy purposes granted. Please do not remove this notice. For more information please visit our website:

www.grassrootsinfo.org.