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Green Cleaning for Healthier Hospitals

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Health care facilities are one of the fastest growing Green cleaning segments.

Health care facilities are one of the fastest growing Green cleaning segments, according to Mike Sawchuk, vice president and general manager of Green cleaning chemical products manufacturer Enviro-Solutions.

Sawchuk is right. Distributors of Green cleaning products and supplies that are looking to break into this market need to educate themselves about the issues hospitals and nursing homes face to ensure their Green cleaning solutions are successfully put in place.

THE CLEANING TOLL

In the United States alone, 99,000 people die each year in hospitals of health care associated infections (HAIs). It is estimated that 1.7 million infections also occur annually, affecting 5 to 10 percent of hospitalized patients, also adding nearly \$20 billion to the nation's health care costs.

While it is clear that some of the best strategies to address infection rates include single patient rooms, hand washing and personal protective equipment, many health care professionals are now reexamining both how they clean, and the kinds of products they use to clean and disinfect. Their efforts are now trying to prevent HAIs while also minimizing exposure risks to chemicals for patients and staff. Green cleaning chemicals and equipment, when used in combination with efficacious cleaning/disinfection processes, can benefit patient and worker safety as well as reduce environmental impact, and occasionally, the bottom line.

THE CLEANING ENVIRONMENT IN HOSPITALS

Bloomington Hospital, located in south central Indiana, began the Green cleaning process in 2007 with the help of their director of Environmental Services, John Freeman. They set up a trial comparing Green products on the maintenance of their floor surfaces. By doing this, Freeman was able to implement a small change that introduced Green cleaning as a way to improve patient satisfaction and to reduce the incidence of cleaning-related health issues.

Green cleaning is new territory for most hospitals, and as Freeman points out, the staff has many questions about these new products and their processes. “We were especially interested in learning how Green cleaning affects infection rates, overall costs and labor,” explains Freeman. “We also needed to know what support system is available from the supplier.”

Freeman found that by switching to Green cleaning products, labor times were cut in half and the products used had a better scent. Bringing in these Greener products also resulted in an 8 to 13 percent reduction in cost compared to the cost of traditional cleaners. As a result, the significant buy-in from nursing staff allowed his hospital to bring on more Green cleaning products in their daily cleaning routines. The hospital has seen great success in using Green cleaning products in the care of hard floor surfaces.

THE BACTERIA DEBATE

Of the many health and safety concerns in a hospital, bacteria can be one of the deadliest.

To eliminate this threat, hospitals make use of sanitizers and disinfectants, specific chemicals that are largely misunderstood, to clean their facilities. In short, a sanitizer reduces the number of infectious organisms present within 30 seconds, and a disinfectant is meant to kill pathogenic organisms as listed on its label in between five and 10 minutes.

Hospitals, as Freeman explains, must protect the safety of its patients and staff and cannot afford cleaning inefficiencies, “One concern is ensuring that Green cleaning products combat pathogens as well as traditional cleaning products. We need to kill bacteria, not clean it. We’ve worked together with our infection control team to ensure that the new Green cleaning products we’re using are as effective as the products we used previously.”

In an article for *Infection Control Today*, Sawchuk of Enviro-Solutions wrote that disinfectants, products designed to destroy disease-causing microorganisms, cannot be certified as Green in the United States. This is still the case; however, ongoing stakeholder consultations continue with the Environmental Protection Agency to discuss allowing the Greener products within the disinfectant category to be certified, making the selection process easier for hospital purchasers/procurement staff.

While disinfectants are still waiting for their Green light in the United States hand sanitizers help to cut the spread of certain types of microbes, and some sanitizers and disinfectants have even attained the EcoLogo certification, meeting the program’s standard for environmental leadership in this cleaning category.

A DOSE OF ADVICE

How can distributors of Green cleaning solutions possibly navigate the challenging hospital environment? It is actually easier than it looks, and many organizations and cleaning professionals are sharing their experience.

Practice Greenhealth, the nation’s leading membership and networking organization for institutions in the health care community, recommends that suppliers provide demos and

training in the facilities. Expertise in the area of Green cleaning is essential, as is providing proper dispensing solutions and offering innovative ways to boost the benefits of a hospital's Green program. An example of this is offering products with packaging made of recycled content.

Cecilia DeLoach, senior manager of Sustainable Operations at Practice Greenhealth, recommends that suppliers take on an integrated approach when working with health care facilities. "Get Environmental Services and Infection Control staff members together when offering a Green cleaning solution," says DeLoach.

Keys to Green cleaning program success, DeLoach explains, are effective, thorough cleaning, selection of the right Green cleaning products and then the purchase of environmental equipment that will work with the new program.

The Green Guide for Health Care, developed with help from Practice Greenhealth, is a resource that offers a step-by-step approach that allows hospitals and other health care facilities to make small initial changes and to subsequently move onto larger Green cleaning and building projects.

Andre Foisy, director of development at Larose, a manufacturer and distributor of cleaning products since 1954, works with McGill University Health Center in Quebec, which is made up of five hospitals and 1,650 beds. From his 27 years of experience, he knows that health care professionals are looking at cleaning from a health and safety point of view. When choosing Green cleaning products, they want to know that the products are not only safe for people, but that they also perform as well as traditional products and can be bought at a comparable price, explains Foisy.


Foisy has also been working with ATP (adenosine triphosphate) monitors — devices that are typically used in the food service industry for sanitation tests — to verify that Green cleaning procedures and practices are effective. These ATP monitors determine sanitation efficacy in a fraction of the time that it takes to send a swab test to a lab. ATP is the universal energy molecule found in all animal, plant, bacteria, yeast and mold cells. Technologies such as the ATP monitor are ways that Green cleaning can be shown to be effective.

Bill Fisher, president of Intelligent Cleaning Systems Inc., said, "Staff see the benefits of Green chemicals once they have received training and have had a chance to work with them." He dispels the myth of higher costs to his clients by showing them how concentrates and dispensing systems help to contain and control costs.

GREEN CLEANING FOR HEALTHIER, SAFER HOSPITALS

The existence of organizations that advocate for Greener, healthier and safer health care, such as Health Care Without Harm and Practice Greenhealth, are certainly an indication that Green cleaning is on hospitals' agendas.

Understanding that education, demonstrations and training are necessary support services ensures the successful adoption of Green cleaning within a hospital's environmental



services program. These tools and the right Green cleaning chemicals will ensure suppliers' and distributors' success within the health care sector.

Organizations that advocate for Greener, healthier hospitals:

Health Care Without Harm: (www.noharm.org)

Practice Greenhealth: (www.practicegreenhealth.org)

A checklist for hospitals who are going Green:

Green Guide for Health Care: (www.gghc.org)

Third-party certifications that help identify environmentally preferable cleaning products:

EcoLogo Program: (www.ecologo.org)

Green Seal: (www.greenseal.org)

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