

The Wisconsin Union Green Cleaning Policy Statement of Purpose

At the Wisconsin Union, it is our policy to build and maintain a sustainable building. To this end, we have established The Wisconsin Union's Healthy High Performance Cleaning Program. Healthy high performance green cleaning practices include the use of green cleaning chemicals, employing cleaning processes that benefit public health and the environment and purchasing environmentally preferable custodial products.

Purpose

Healthy high performance cleaning is defined as cleaning to protect health without harming the environment. It has been found that widely used cleaning products can have serious adverse effects on the health of building occupants and custodians. At the same time, these cleaning products are harming the environment. Green cleaning is a widely accepted movement to make cleaning for the health of building occupants and custodians a primary concern, while minimizing the harm to the environment through better purchasing practices and cleaning processes. Healthy high performance cleaning means emphasizing the environmental sustainability of cleaning operations and overall building health (i.e. indoor air quality) and not solely evaluating building cleanliness based in appearance.

How does healthy high performance cleaning work?

Healthy high performance cleaning is more than just substituting chemicals; it involves choosing cleaning processes that improve the health of a building. Methods include preventing dirt and dust from entering the building and using effective and efficient cleaning methods, such as HEPA filtration vacuums, microfiber cloths and chemical free cleaning equipment. The focus on the process of cleaning means that custodial training is an integral step in the process; in addition, comprehensive training is required to ensure that custodians are using the products in a safe and efficient manner. Green cleaning also takes into consideration the product's entire life cycle, favoring concentrated products that are packaged in reduced, refillable or recyclable packaging. The products used in The Wisconsin Union's Healthy High Performance Cleaning program are Green Seal certified. Green Seal is an independent, non-profit certification program.

Benefits of a healthy high performance cleaning program

Health benefits for building occupants: Most people spend 90% of their time indoors, exposing them to chemicals that are used in buildings. The chemicals used in cleaning products have been linked to multiple chemical sensitivity syndrome, allergies, contact dermatitis, headaches, dry eyes, nausea, dizziness and fatigue. Instituting a green cleaning program helps to improve indoor air quality, which in turn, helps to increase workers' productivity, decrease absenteeism and reduce medical and insurance costs.

Health benefits for custodians: Custodians spend their entire day working with harmful chemicals, giving them an increased chance of injury. Cleaning chemicals can cause many health problems for custodians, including: eye damage, skin burns, headaches, asthma, organ damage, reproductive disorders and cancer. Switching to green cleaning products and processes decreases the overall use of chemicals and hazardous products, which decreases risk of injury to custodians.

Environmental benefits: Cleaning products contain many ingredients that produce harmful environmental effects. Two examples include volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that contribute to photochemical smog, tropospheric ozone, and carcinogenic indoor air quality, and phosphates and nitrates that contribute to eutrophication in waterways. The Wisconsin Union's Healthy High Performance Cleaning program reduces the ecological impact of its products by reducing its overall cleaning chemical use and by purchasing products whose environmental impacts have been tested and proven to be minimal by Green Seal Standards.

Custodial products

The Wisconsin Union has expanded its healthy high performance cleaning program to include paper products such as paper towels and toilet paper. Conventional paper products are often manufactured with virgin pulp, and are bleached with chlorine, which releases dioxin. Dioxin is a known carcinogen that also damages immune systems, reproductive health and causes countless other serious health problems. Luckily, there are many alternatives available that are more environmentally friendly. Unbleached, recycled-content papers are the ideal choice. The Wisconsin Union's Healthy High Performance Cleaning program chooses products recommended by Green Seal made by Bay West. The Wisconsin Unions also offers paper towel dispensers and hand-drying methods (such as the Dyson Air-Blade) that have less harmful life cycle impact than traditional folded paper towels and their dispensers. In addition, the Wisconsin Union uses recycled content trash bags wherever possible, as long as they perform as well as standard bags. The custodial staff is also trained to reduce the number of trash liners used when trash bins can be emptied into a larger bin without needing to replace the liner.

Custodial Training

Wisconsin Union employees are provided with a comprehensive training program designed to provide them with the knowledge they need to perform their daily tasks. The training program is provided by The Wisconsin Union Training Resource Center in conjunction with the Custodial Program manager and supervisors. The initial training program is a three day introduction to The Wisconsin Union's Healthy High Performance Cleaning program, safety including annual blood born pathogen certification, unit policies and procedures, and orientation. The training is a two step process encompassing both classroom and hands-on experiences. At the end of the training sessions an evaluation is conducted to measure staff understanding of the material covered. Retraining is provided as new practices and/or products are introduced to the program.