



---

# Growth trends in the green maintenance movement

---

**By Michael Wilson**, former editor of *Maintenance Supplies* magazine.





## Growth trends in the green maintenance movement

**The Green revolution that is taking place in the Cleaning and Maintenance Industry is indicative—and indeed a part of—a larger overall shift in consciousness among consumers. Across the board, the paradigm is changing. In a Gallup poll conducted just three years ago, between 80 and 90 percent of Americans said they participated in simple eco-conscious behaviors like recycling and reducing energy usage, while 73 percent bought environmentally beneficial products.**

And just as consumers are driving this change, the markets are adapting. Economic research shows that the sales of eco-friendly products increased \$150 Million from 2000 to 2004, and that socially responsible investments are the fastest growing sector of financial services and account for one in every eight dollars invested in the US markets.

The Green phenomenon is building momentum in the cleaning and maintenance industry as well. As business owners and their patrons become more aware of just how their actions and decisions affect the environments in which they live, work and play, so too is their sense of protecting and maintaining those environments heightened.

### **In the Beginning**

For all intents and purposes, environmentally friendly products and services hit the maintenance industry in full force in the early 1990s. With the US Government's Executive Order 13101 which called for the use of "products and services that reduce the health and environmental impacts compared to similar products and services used for the same purpose," a new trend in the sanitary maintenance industry was born.

The usable definition that became widely adopted to describe this new trend was simply, "a method of cleaning that is safer for workers, building occupants, and the environment."

But just as quickly as these eco-friendly products arrived on the scene, they were discounted even

quicker. Products that cost more and performed less were forced back to the R&D labs by the market. It's taken nearly 15 years to overcome the black eye that the Green push suffered in its stages of infancy, but as product efficacy improved and manufacturing costs declined, they have made a tremendous comeback in the cleaning and maintenance industry.

**Economic research shows that the sales of eco-friendly products increased \$150 Million from 2000-2004.**

What's different today? Well, many components have contributed greatly to the resurgence of environmentally preferable products: better products, consumer awareness, etc. But thanks mostly to the development of legitimate certification systems, the industry's claims now have validation, with a barometer to help consumers accurately determine what "green" truly meant.



**GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER ONE TO PURCHASING GREEN PRODUCTS: Include environmental factors as well as traditional considerations of price and performance as part of the normal purchasing process.**

---

### A seal of approval

For those seeking verification on the green products they are currently purchasing, one of the first actions to take should be to understand the legitimacy of the products' environmental claims. As the green phenomenon has grown over the past few years, so too have the number of certification labels, muddying the waters surrounding the definition of just exactly what a "green" product consists of. And although there are no definitive criteria for "green" products, there are industry standards that make getting the right information easier and help create a level playing field with the competition.

Determining the environmental status of a product is no different than claiming any other functional aspect of it. Representatives from EcoLogo™ and Green Seal®, third-party organizations that are standardizing green products in the industry, say there are environmental and marketing guidelines enforced by the Federal Trade Commission stating that any claim a company is making about their product, environmental or not, must be valid.

For example, if a company says that their product is biodegradable, they should have a biodegradability test filed somewhere stating that they've performed appropriate tests on the product. If not, the claim should not be considered valid. There are rules in place against misleading customers with false information, but it's up to us to do our homework.

### Checks and balances

The use of non-scientific words and phrases to describe how 'green' a product is, is something that distributors and consumers have recently been on the lookout for. When choosing true green products to stock their shelves with, it is just as important to look at what's left out as to what is included, as well as taking a comprehensive view into the overall environmental impact of what goes into producing that product. You'll find that some companies are not only reaching the standard,

but are raising the bar to provide their customers products that are safe, healthy and leave as small a footprint as possible.

There are rules in place against misleading customers with false information, but it's up to us to do our homework.

The best way to determine "who's who" in each category is to start with the industry certifications, then proceed with full ingredient exposure and extended research into recycling contents, the amount of energy and water needed to make the products, fuel savings on delivery, and the natural resources harvested and what's put back into landfills.

Educating the industry on how to recognize and steer clear of less-than-admirable eco-claims is a task that some government and third-party organizations have adopted in recent years. The Center for the New American Dream is one such entity taking on this responsibility.

There are a number of companies that have been unable or unwilling to meet green cleaning criteria so they have developed their own set of criteria. But what these companies encourage a purchaser to do is to ask very specific questions about every environmental claim. When someone says something is environmentally-preferable, they're teaching people to ask, 'Exactly what do you mean by that?'



### GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER TWO TO PURCHASING GREEN PRODUCTS:

**Emphasize pollution prevention early in the purchasing process.**



---

and ‘What test data do you have to support that claim?’ All claims should be verifiable. Everyone has the right to know exactly what is being used in the products they supply and purchase.

### **It’s here to stay**

In recent years, the green segment has caught fire. Maintenance Supplies, a trade journal covering the trends of the cleaning and maintenance industry, last year released findings that showed 53 percent of its readers believed that Green cleaning was “the hottest trend in the industry.” Unlike the previous decade, the fad was over; green is here to stay.

Today, certified green products have to work as well as or better than their traditional counterparts, be cost competitive (or cost neutral) and be safer for the environment and the health of cleaning workers and building occupants. Price and performance being equal, most consumers will choose Green and now they are getting that opportunity.

As cleaning’s impact on occupant health and the environment (both internal and external) continues to gain attention, and the sociological, ecological and economical benefits that can be reaped by implementing a program using environmentally friendly products become realized, more and more industries are switching to—and even mandating—that “Green” paper, chemicals, equipment and processes be used to maintain their facilities.

In a March, 2007 study performed by a leading marketing group in the industry, results of a survey found that 87 percent of distributors that primarily sell cleaning and maintenance products believed that “Green” was indeed a profitable segment of the industry. Sixty percent were interested in attending continuing educational courses to help them learn and sell the benefits of Green products to their customers, and nearly half felt that each market segment in the industry needed its own bundle of products and services.

This information is revealing on many levels; none more important than the realization by these distributors that protecting the health and environments of their customers now matters across many segments. Hospitality, Education, Healthcare, Office Buildings, Industrial, Foodservice, Retail... the list goes on and on into nearly the entire economic landscape.

### **Early adopters, lasting benefits**

The Green movement has taken root nationally as cities, companies, school systems, governments, healthcare facilities and the general public become aware of benefits to personal health and the environment.

**Price and performance being equal, most consumers will choose Green and now they are getting that opportunity.**

Those benefits reduce liability, employee and student absenteeism, employee turnover and occupant complaints. Coincidentally, consumers are finding that tenant and student satisfaction and performance have increased, as well as the marketability of these properties. Make no mistake, economics play a key role in the advancement of the green movement in the cleaning and maintenance industry. Profit is not a dirty word, but it doesn’t have to be a harmful one either.



**GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER THREE TO PURCHASING GREEN PRODUCTS: Examine multiple environmental attributes throughout a product’s or service’s life cycle.**



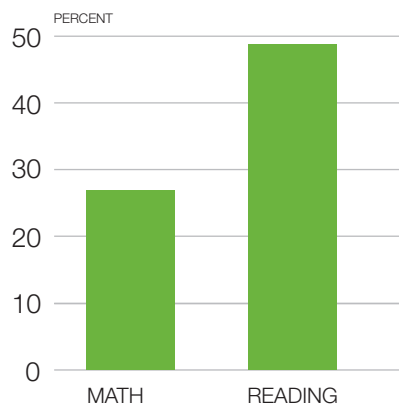
There has never been a better time to become a green purchaser. Today, there is quite a bit of healthy competition in the marketplace and the price of these products has dropped as a result. Not only from a consumer side, but from the manufacturing one as well, the standards that have been set into place have helped level the playing field so that consumers are now getting a true apples to apples comparison.

### Healthy habits

According to research done by The Ashkin Group, a cleaner working environment is a more productive working environment. And it is in these particular areas where green experts and manufacturers see the most potential for growth.

Going beyond the obvious dangers associated with the cleaning crews themselves, research also

## Improved test scores in math and reading as a result of green cleaning programs.



Test results from students at Charles Young Elementary School, Chicago

shows that many green products play a determining role in the poor Indoor Air Quality found to negatively affect occupants in these businesses;

thus, contributing greatly to absenteeism, low morale and decreased productivity.

In educational facilities, it's been proven that math, reading and standardized test scores are up and student absenteeism down when green cleaning programs are implemented. Working specifically with the Charles Young Elementary School in Chicago, an Ashkin Group study revealed that after facility restoration, attendance was up four percent, health complaints were significantly reduced, math scores increased by 49 percent and reading skills were up 27 percent.

One might ask why the paper industry would care what was happening in the advancement of green chemicals. And the answer would be found in the latest green trend sweeping the industry—system selling.

### Bundling up

Green in the maintenance industry is not about a specific product; it's about implementing a process that provides a safer, more productive indoor environment. And that's done through a combination of environmentally-friendly products and practices. Beginning with entranceway matting which is placed at the building doorways to keep out 75 to 80 percent of dirt and contaminants from entering the building and thus helping to reduce the usage of chemicals, water and energy needed to clean the facility, to use of green chemicals, low-moisture carpet extractors and microfiber mopping systems among others create the need for selling a complete green solution.



**GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER FOUR TO PURCHASING GREEN PRODUCTS: Compare relative environmental impacts when selecting products and services.**



Obviously, paper is a large component of this system, and indeed plays an integral role in successfully implementing a green program. What good would it be to consumers if they went into a restroom, used eco-friendly hand soap but were not given the option to use paper products that were produced chlorine free, made from 100 percent recycled materials or utilized less packaging materials to get their products to market? It would send a confusing message to the business's customers.

To be green, a facility must embrace the movement as a whole. And doing so will likely "lead" to greater profits.

### **LEEDing the way**

To measure and validate the green system, the US Green Building Council has created the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program.

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) is a non-profit organization composed of leaders from every sector of the building industry working to promote buildings that are environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work. Its more than 10,500 member organizations and network of 75 regional chapters are united to advance the group's mission of transforming the building industry to sustainability.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED gives building owners and operators the tools they need to have an immediate and measurable impact on their buildings' performance.

LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings,

energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.

For commercial buildings, the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED certification process is helping to create more sustainable buildings both for new construction and existing buildings. Based on a points system where credits are given for environmental advancements in water and energy efficiencies, materials and resources and Indoor Air Quality, the LEED program is changing the landscape on where green is headed in the future of the cleaning and maintenance industry.

### **Things to consider when going green**

Human health:

- Toxicity
- Ingredients/ Regulatory Lists
- MSDS
- LDs
- Flammability
- Corrosiveness
- Third-party Verification

Environment:

- Biodegradability
- Regulatory Lists
- Aquatic toxicity
- VOCs
- Types of builders, solvents, surfactants
- Third-party Verification



#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE NUMBER FIVE TO**

**PURCHASING GREEN PRODUCTS: Collect and base purchasing decisions on accurate and meaningful information about environmental performance.**



---

### **Need more information?**

Check out these resources to find more in-depth, unbiased information about the green industry as well as lists of products—not companies—they endorse.

- The Center for a New American Dream: [www.newdream.org/clean](http://www.newdream.org/clean)
- Green Seal: [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)
- The Ashkin Group: [www.ashkingroup.com](http://www.ashkingroup.com)
- Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project: [www.westp2net.org/janitorial/jp4.htm](http://www.westp2net.org/janitorial/jp4.htm)
- EPA Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program: [www.epa.gov/epp](http://www.epa.gov/epp)
- U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED): [www.usgbc.org/leed](http://www.usgbc.org/leed)
- Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME): [www.ccme.ca/](http://www.ccme.ca/)
- Eco-Logo/Environmental Choice (Canada): [www.terrachoice.com](http://www.terrachoice.com)
- Environmental Choice Program: [www.environmentalchoice.ca](http://www.environmentalchoice.ca)