



Natural Kids®

Natural Kids Green Cleaning in Schools - Part 1

An Interview with the Healthy Schools Campaign

By Donna Doleman Lewis



This month is dedicated to learning about Green Cleaning in Schools. We have interviewed Mark Bishop, Deputy Director of the National Healthy Schools Campaign. The Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) is an independent not-for-profit organization, leading authority on healthy school environments and a voice for people who care about our environment, our children, and education. HSC publishes The Quick & Easy Guide to Green Cleaning in Schools and was instrumental in building the coalition that successfully advocated for a law requiring green cleaning in all Illinois schools. You can access this guide at www.healthyschoolscampaign.org.

1. What exactly does Green Cleaning mean?

Cleaning to protect health without harming the environment. It means taking a look at current cleaning practices and identifying ways to make them healthier, more sustainable and serve staff and building occupants in a better and more effective way.

2. Why is it important for schools and children?

There are a number of ways to look at Green Cleaning: Occupational, student and staff exposures. Products that are used in cleaning programs contain toxic chemicals that have serious potential health repercussions, for example asthma and allergies are examples of potential health issues. Taking steps to reduce the exposure to those chemicals can have a tremendous positive impact on student health. When considering the intention of cleaning, it is important for public health. The reason why we clean a building is not have a shiny floor; it is because we want to prevent the spread of disease. That is the purpose of cleaning. So if we are cleaning to protect public health but we are also introducing chemicals that can potentially harm or make people sick, we are going against the actual intention of cleaning a building. So the fact that we can introduce green cleaning in a way that does not cost more money or in some instances less money, there's no real reason not to incorporate green cleaning.

3. In speaking with parents, teachers, administrators and school nurses about green cleaning, everyone seems very receptive, but the question is always, can green cleaning really do the job? Can it clean bacteria and viruses on surfaces?

If you asked this question 5 or 10 years ago, the answer would have been maybe not, because of the expense and the chemistry may not have been up to par. But the reality is there have been tremendous changes in the cleaning industry. Most (95%) of the product categories out there have equally efficacious products that are cost competitive and ultimately protect health by reducing exposure to harmful chemicals.

Be sure to read next month's column for a continuation of Green Cleaning. In Part 2, hear more about the impact of the Chicago Public Schools green cleaning program and what you can do in your school to Go Green!

Natural Kids is an education, advocacy and consulting company aimed at assisting schools and businesses with creating eco-friendly environments. If you're looking for an exciting curriculum for summer camps, eco-friendly fundraising programs or environmental stewardship education, Natural Kids can help your school or business. For more information on Natural Kids, go to www.natural-kids.com.