



# Harvard University's Green Cleaning Journey

By Tom Seitz

Jason Luke, custodial manager for Harvard University, believes in only using quality cleaning products to clean the Ivy League university's buildings. With that in mind, Luke was skeptical when he first started hearing word of the green cleaning movement about 10 years ago. Along with talk of the trend, the cleaning industry was buzzing with hearsay that these new "green" products did not perform as well as traditional cleaning products.

Luke continued to monitor the path of green cleaning and took note as the environmental sustainability movement gained momentum. Not only was the cleaning industry interested, but the general public and the university also were keen on improving the health and safety of buildings, occupants and the environment.

"Overall, I noticed an increased interest in conservation of resources, the elimination of hazardous chemicals from buildings and an overall concern for public health and the safety of building occupants," Luke said. "In addition, cleaning product manufacturers were making it possible to do it all for very little cost."

Even more, product development had improved and manufacturers were producing cleaning products that performed just as well as traditional products—with fewer harmful chemicals. A product-certifying organization called Green Seal became known in the industry and trusted among cleaning managers because Green Seal only certifies chemicals that meet

not only "green" criteria, but performance criteria as well.

## On the Green Track

A few years ago, Luke, along with other Harvard officials launched the university's green cleaning program. Luke looked to his longtime, trusted cleaning product manufacturer to help him with the transition.

"My current product manufacturer not only provided us with Green Seal certified chemicals, but also provided a how-to training manual, materials on how to market and implement a green cleaning program, posters and more," Luke said. "The guides include procedures, tools, training and other tips, like how to minimize waste."

With the help of literature and training materials, Luke decided he wanted to create a green cleaning program unique to Harvard, its community and its facilities. Even though the program was created by Luke, he said it was largely based on the products he selected from the manufacturer. In the process of creating the program, Luke conducted hours and hours of research on green cleaning.

"In doing research to design our own green cleaning program, we found that the information given to us by the manufacturer actually supported all the data we had gathered and affirmed that we had not missed a lot by following the manufacturer's guide," Luke said. "We already were on the right track."

## Going, Going ... Green

Before implementing any new product or system, Luke makes sure to test the product or system on-site. Incorporating new products, concepts and procedures is an ongoing process and Luke continues to phase in new elements building by building.

"We're trying to be smart about this," Luke said. "For instance, we are using up old products instead of dumping them."

As each new project is started up to completion, building occupants are informed along the way. Luke's department provides helpful materials to occupants such as a fact sheet explaining what green cleaning means. He has also selected internal clients to help promote the program.

## Next Steps

For the next few years, Luke will continue to incorporate more green products and procedures into the university's existing program, with more pilot programs scheduled for this summer.

"It's an ongoing process that will never be complete, but in the next three to four years I hope to have all old products phased out and hope to be using green products and procedures in every area of operation," Luke said. "Everything the manufacturer provided us was really helpful, saving us a ton of work."

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*Tom Seitz is director of environmental programs for JohnsonDiversey, North America. For more information, go to [www.johnsondiversey.com](http://www.johnsondiversey.com).*