

Green Clean Schools



Healthy Cleaning for Students, Staff and the Environment

Step 5: Share the Responsibility

Five Steps to Green Cleaning in Schools

[GreenCleanSchools.org](https://www.GreenCleanSchools.org)

Step 5: Share the Responsibility

Cleanliness, health and safety are not solely the custodian's responsibility. Everyone plays a role in maintaining a healthy environment—students, teachers, administrators, even unions and outside contractors. Green cleaning programs in schools promote stewardship and demonstrate a school's commitment to thinking globally and acting locally.

Promoting Stewardship

The idea of sharing responsibility for building cleanliness is a foreign concept in most schools. Custodians tend to take the brunt of criticism for environmental problems. The goal is to promote environmental stewardship across the school community so that each stakeholder group—administrators, staff, teachers, students, visitors and vendors—takes personal responsibility for both the school environment and the global environment. Schools can promote stewardship simply by sharing their success stories with the community.

The goal is to promote environmental stewardship across the school community so that each stakeholder takes personal responsibility in both the school environment and the global environment. Adopting recycling throughout the school, buying recycled paper and plastic, conserving water and energy and using environmentally preferable (green) cleaning chemicals are among the many opportunities a school has to be more green.

Share Your Story!

We'd love to know about your experiences with green cleaning in schools! How have you implemented your green cleaning program? What benefits have you seen? What challenges have you faced? To share your story, visit: <http://greencleanschools.org/about/contact-us>.

Communicate to Stakeholders

Frequent, two-way communication with everyone involved is critical to planning and implementing a green cleaning program. After your school successfully greens its cleaning operations, share your story with the community and educate other stakeholders.

Communications Goals

The best way to communicate goals is to educate and inform all stakeholders about the value of green cleaning and the purpose of the program, policy and plan. Stakeholders need to understand the reasons for the program, the expected benefits and their roles in the program's implementation and ongoing success. This should build support and engage stakeholders in the process from the start.

Communications Media

The most effective communications programs use more than one medium to reach intended audiences. It also should be integrated with the school's overall communication's vehicles. The goal is to communicate milestones and spark conversations that will keep stakeholders engaged. Some options include:

- A green team section in the school blog or newsletter
- Updates on the school's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest accounts
- Text message or email campaigns
- Daily loudspeaker announcements
- Earth Day celebrations
- Presentations at Health and Safety Committee meetings
- In-service educational programs
- Posting internal daily or weekly logs of cleaning schedule and procedures
- Press releases to local news organizations
- Recycling events
- Simple flyers or bulletin board posters
- Staff e-mails
- Stickers on restroom mirrors

Introducing the Green Cleaning Program

During the start-up phase, small meetings or briefings with different stakeholder groups can answer common questions. Be sure to include

outside groups that use the school facility, such as parent and scouting groups, in these sessions. Concepts to communicate in an introductory presentation include:

- What is green cleaning all about?
- Stress the value of protecting health and the environment
- Cite examples of successful programs in other schools

Setting Expectations

The green team should stress that the current program is not bad, but it can be better.

Discussion topics may include:

- New procedures
- Why the new chemicals, paper products and equipment are better
- The various stakeholders' responsibilities
- Participation in surveys, which may be as simple as calling to report a spill
- Provide honest and constructive feedback

Communicating Major Activities

After the green cleaning program is up and running, keep the stakeholders informed of major or significant cleaning events and milestones. These can include:

- Major floor work such as stripping, scrubbing and re-coating
- Carpet spotting or cleaning
- Pesticide application
- Lawn chemical application

Other Communication Opportunities

Communication is important even when no one is asking questions, and keeping successes top-of-mind is important with a new program. Schools should look for unique opportunities to keep the message vital and current.

Green Cleaning Award for Schools & Universities

The Green Cleaning Award for Schools & Universities is the only award where schools and their facility leaders are recognized for the tireless work of promoting clean, healthy and sustainable school buildings. Presented by Healthy Schools Campaign, American School &

University magazine and the Green Cleaning Network, it highlights schools with innovative, health-focused and environmentally minded cleaning programs. Applicants are judged based on the Five Steps outlined on GreenCleanSchools.org. Find details online at: <http://greencleanschools.org/recognition/green-cleaning-award-for-schools-universities>.

And be sure to sign up for our newsletter so you won't miss the chance to enter:

<http://greencleanschools.org/about/contact-us>.

In addition to the Green Cleaning Award, schools may want to pursue the Green Ribbon Schools program. This program from the U.S. Department of Education recognizes K-12 schools that create healthy and sustainable learning environments and teach environmental literacy.

Tooting Your own Horn

Tell people when something good happens. The more stakeholders who understand the benefits of the green cleaning program, the more resources the team will have to continue and expand the program. Prepare for positive press as occupants notice changes. Typical events that will garner good press are those that leave a smell or odor (even a pleasant fragrance, or better yet a lack of fragrance, will be perceived as something different). The key is to communicate prior to the event whenever possible. A proactive approach is always better than receiving negative press and then being placed on the defensive.

Health and Safety Fairs, Science Fairs and Similar Events

Public events are excellent venues for telling a green cleaning success story. This might include a simple email or poster with tips that families can use at home. Annual Observances, such as Earth Day, Recycling Day and Environmental Awareness Days, are obvious and often overlooked opportunities to communicate the program's environmental benefits.

Communicating with Vendors, Outside Contractors and Visitors

There may be some obstacles along the way as changes are made. Building occupants might complain about roofing work because the odors drawn in from outside can cause irritations. The same is true for elevator and HVAC maintenance experts, pest control applicators and landscapers. These vendors can reduce health and environmental impacts with how they deliver their goods and services. These vendors should be aware of how they can support your program.

Visitors and groups using school property should be informed about the green cleaning program, ideally with a posted green cleaning policy. For example, a community group meeting in the library should understand how to set up, break down and clean up the room in keeping with the green cleaning policy. Establish a small set-up and clean-up fee as a deposit that covers the extra effort custodians must make to accommodate outside groups.

As the green cleaning program matures, the green team may work with contractors and purchasing agents to incorporate language into vendor contracts that defines their roles and responsibilities with respect to indoor environmental quality.

Case Studies

We call it learning from the leaders. You might call it checking out the competition. Either way, one of the best ways to learn about green cleaning is to learn from schools like yours who have already been down this road. You'll be impressed by the number of schools and universities around the nation have initiated green cleaning programs and experienced big wins by doing so. Check out our website for case studies:

<http://greencleanschools.org/recognition/about-the-winners>.

Winners of the Green Cleaning Award and other schools have made general information, case studies, and reports available to those interested in testing similar strategies. Our Leadership Council comprises past Green Cleaning Award for Schools and University

winners who want to help school across the nation win at green cleaning, too.

Learn more about the award:

<http://greencleanschools.org/recognition/green-cleaning-award-for-schools-universities>.

Learn more about the Leadership Council:

<http://greencleanschools.org/green-cleaning-leadership-council>.

Get Started!

Now that you have the steps laid out before you, it's all about moving forward with your plan.

Contact us at Healthy Schools Campaign to share your story, ask follow-up questions or find out how to connect with green cleaning leaders across the country. Our newsletter is a great way to stay on top of green cleaning trends and learn about what other schools are doing that really works. You can contact us and subscribe to the newsletter online at:

<http://greencleanschools.org/about/contact-us>.

And now that you're preparing your green cleaning program, you'll want to prepare your school to apply for the Green Cleaning Award for Schools & Universities. Learn more here: <http://greencleanschools.org/recognition/green-cleaning-award-for-schools-universities>.