

Step 5

Share the Responsibility

5 Steps to Green Cleaning in Schools

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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.

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? [Let us know!](#)

Promoting Stewardship

- The idea of sharing responsibility for building cleanliness can be challenging for many schools, but it can also make your program more successful. 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.

Everyone Has a Role

Since you most likely have already established your green team, you know that everyone has a voice.

However, everyone also has a responsibility to make sure your green cleaning program succeeds. You'll need all stakeholders to play a role for a successful program, roles that go beyond the custodial staff and facility operators.

1. Teachers play an important role in promoting and maintaining a clean and healthy classroom. One of the most important steps teachers can take is to encourage and provide opportunities for frequent and effective hand washing. Teachers can also help create a healthy school environment by:
 - Minimizing clutter so the classrooms can be cleaned thoroughly and efficiently
 - Working with custodians in obtaining green cleaning products
 - Assisting with sanitizing between classes on high touch points
 - Avoiding the use of cleaning products not in the program
2. Students are the primary customers of the school and should understand how they can maintain an environmentally friendly and healthy building. They can support a green cleaning program by:
 - Picking up after themselves
 - Practicing good hygiene
 - Stacking chairs on desks and picking up papers to make it easier for custodians to clean
3. Parents can bring external perspective to a school green team, thereby assisting community efforts and supporting efforts to reduce cleaning products that are being brought in from outside of school. This not only helps avoid miscommunication but also attracts additional resources and expertise.
4. School Nurses can be helpful in monitoring and recognizing trends in reported illnesses. This monitoring may warn of environmental problems

related to cleaning or other factors. Also, the school nurse can be an important advocate and teach people about proper hand hygiene and the relationship between green cleaning and better student health and performance.

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.

Communicating Your 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 building occupants in the process from the start.

Communication Channels

The most effective communications programs use more than one medium to reach intended audiences. It also should be integrated with the school's overall communications 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

Communicating Major Activities

When your 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 Simple Steps outlined here in this document! Find details

online and sign up for our newsletter so you won't miss the chance to enter.

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.

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. 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](#).