



Squeaky Clean and Green

By [Barbara E. Cohen](#) on November 13, 2007 in [News & Features](#) · [Add Comment](#) ·

As you get ready for the holidays, cleaning is usually at the top of the to-do list. But, just how environmentally clean are the products you select? In an era of growing environmental awareness, using just any solution isn't good enough for those concerned about the impact of cleaning products on the environment.

"All of our customers are looking for safe and effective green products at affordable prices," said Laura Mohlenhoff, head of Indianapolis' 90-year-old, family owned A.G. Maas Company, a building supply store that carries several earth friendly cleaning products, such as e-logical Concentrated All Purpose Cleaner.

"For the most part, retail residential customers tend to look for convenience and ready-to-use products. But to be truly green, you should buy in concentrates. They take up less space, fewer resources in the production of packaging, and lower transportation costs. They are extremely economical compared to ready-to-use counterparts.

" Even the biggies, such as SC Johnson, a company known for several brands, including Pledge, Windex and Shout, are focused on environmentally responsible products. "Today, through our Greenlist program, we evaluate every single raw material that goes into our products, ensuring they're better for the health of your family," said H. Fisk Johnson, chairman and chief executive officer of the 121-year-old, family-owned company in Racine, Wis.

The company developed the Greenlist process in 2001, an awardwinning patented system that ensures products contain materials that are the best available for the environment, taking into account performance, aesthetics and consumer cost. When the company began the Greenlist process, it meant going beyond meeting legal and regulatory requirements, Fisk said. The list provides ratings for more than 95 percent of the raw materials the company uses, including solvents, propellants, insecticides, packaging and more. The company tries to replace raw materials that have an unacceptable rating with those that are more biodegradable and have a

better environmental or health profile. The process has helped SC Johnson achieve a 400-percent increase in the use of raw materials that are best rated.

For many consumers, a leading brand for nontoxic and environmentally safe household products is Seventh Generation. The Burlington, Vt.,-based company has been manufacturing environmentally friendly laundry detergent and recycled toilet paper for 20 years, with distribution nationwide in thousands of natural product and grocery stores.

Green cleaning solutions are more effective than they were just five or 10 years ago, said John Wunderlich, vice president of sales at NYCO Products Inc., of Countryside, Ill., which manufactures environmentally friendly products. Advances in chemistry, surfactants or wetting agents, solvent replacements and bio-renewable sources have made them equal to comparable non-green products in most categories.

In particular, the emergence of Green Seal™, as the first nationally recognized standard for green cleaning products, spurred the development and acceptance of new products.

“The emphasis on green products is much higher in schools because of the efforts of teachers’ unions, parents’ associations and media attention to asthma. Awareness in the workplace is growing, but at a slower rate, Wunderlich said. “Media attention to sick building syndrome also builds awareness. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that green building products, which contribute to a healthy indoor environment, save the U.S. economy more than \$60 billion in lost productivity and unknown amounts in medical expenses for American workers.”

Consumers and commercial clients are much more aware of the energy efficient and environmentally sound building design called for in programs such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, Mohlenhoff said. The emphasis on green building has heightened interest in green cleaning products.

The most popular green products are general-purpose cleaners, glass, carpet and bath cleaners and degreasers, Wunderlich said. “Greener alternatives exist for any cleaning product, but not all are certified as green because there aren’t standards for every category. Also, some products, such as oven cleaners and bleach, are aggressive and harmful by their very nature.

Look for green cleaners that promote a healthy environment, then those that leave a clean appearance.”

Still, Mohlenhoff said, “customers need specialty products to tackle tough cleaning jobs, and as often as possible, we steer them to appropriate green products.”

The cleaning experts recommended people interested in green products heed warning labels on corrosives and flammables. Evaluate if they are necessary, and then try to find replacements. Select items with longer life cycles, such as vacuums, brooms, fluorescent light bulbs and ENERGY STAR-rated appliances. Look for products with a thirdparty green certification. Use products with low volatile organic compounds, or VOC, levels and without fragrances, which can trigger allergies and asthma. Purchase concentrated products and dilute them with tap water. Recycle, Wunderlich said.

The best practice is prevention, Mohlenhoff said. “Get a good mat for the entryway to eliminate contaminants entering your home or office. The more you keep the area clean, the less you have to use cleaning products. Also, regular cleaning keeps dirt from building up; you need tougher cleaners to tackle big jobs.”

For more information:

- Laura Mohlenhoff A.G. Maas Company (317) 632-8315
laura@agmaas.com www.agmaas.com
- John Wunderlich NYCO Products (708) 805-9568
jwunderlich@nycoproducts.com www.nycoproducts.com
- SC Johnson www.scjohnson.com
- Greenseal <http://www.greenseal.org>
- Seventh Generation www.seventhgeneration.com