



## More States Requiring 'Green' Cleaning Products in Schools

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In an era where the "3 Rs" have now come to stand for "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle," an increasing number of states are requiring schools and government buildings to use environmentally friendly cleaning products.

By the end of 2009, 10 states, including Connecticut, Illinois and New York, had already enacted Green Clean Schools Acts requiring or encouraging the use of environmentally sensitive cleaning and maintenance products in schools, according to Green Seal Inc., a nonprofit whose eco-certification is internationally recognized and well-respected.

Similar legislation is expected to be considered in 2010 in at least five states, including California and Wisconsin.

"The goal of the bill is to make schools and other public space less toxic and healthier for kids and the general public," Democratic Rep. Cory Mason, sponsor of the Wisconsin act, tells the Associated Press.

Though each state's guidelines differ somewhat, cleaning product categories under the acts that schools are required to purchase green include bathroom cleaners, carpet cleaners, general purpose and hard floor surface cleaners, glass, window and mirror cleaners, hand cleaners and soaps and paper products. In addition, most states require that green cleaning products carry

one of three leading eco-labels: Green Seal, Design for the Environment (DfE) from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or EcoLogo of Canada.

According to the Healthy Schools Campaign, a nonprofit that advocates for healthy school environments, research shows a clear link between poor indoor air quality, sick students and teachers and poor academic and occupational performance. In addition, the HSC reports that children miss more than 14 million school days each year due to asthma exacerbated by poor indoor air quality, and cites health concerns with regard to custodial staff, especially women of child-bearing age.

With this in mind, opposition to green school cleaning requirements would seem unthinkable. However, critics say that while the measures are commendable, states should not mandate school or agency purchasing policies, especially if they increase costs for institutions that are already struggling financially.

Nevada's green school cleaning bill was cut down last year after school officials raised concerns about cost and lack of expertise in green cleaning, resulting in a law requiring only the use of environmentally sensitive floor cleaners. Similarly, Hawaii's Gov. Linda Lingle vetoed a bill last year which would have required the Board of Education to give

preference to products approved by Green Seal. The Hawaiian legislature, however, overrode the veto.

With the introduction in recent years of a wide range of environmentally friendly cleaning products, many prices are now comparable to those of traditional products.

In an interview with the Associated Press, John Matthews, senior vice president for JohnsonDiversey, a Wisconsin-based manufacturer of cleaning products, confirms: "There is no reason to pay a penny more to acquire green products. Plain and simple."

However, toilet paper, trash bags and paper towels made from recycled materials can still cost up to 20 percent more than traditional products, according to Stephen Ashkin, executive director of the Green Cleaning Network.

In a survey of New York state public, nonpublic and charter schools, conducted by the New York Office of General Services, respondent schools reported that their costs went up 10 percent, on average, in the first year they complied with a 2005 cleaning law. But the office says successful programs reduce levels of cleaning chemicals, mold and dust that cause asthma attacks, a top reason students miss school.

The statistics are encouraging, but clearly not everyone is convinced that the trade-off will be worth it.

"If the choice is between being mandated to buy a new vacuum cleaner or keep your elementary music teacher, I'm not sure that's the direction we ought to be going," Dan Rossmiller, a lobbyist for the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, tells the AP.

Ashkin says it's unclear whether budget-focused legislators will find time to pass green cleaning laws in 2010.

"But without a doubt," Ashkin tells the AP, "the trend is definitely moving in this direction."