



CLEANING GREEN

There are few environments where sanitation and cleanliness are as essential. Yet the products that most restaurants use for cleaning and insect control are toxic to the environment, and unhealthy for both your employees and customers.

Restaurants use a wide range of cleaning products containing chlorine (in anti-bacterial sprays, drain and toilet bowl cleaners), ammonia (in window and floor cleaners), caustic soda (in oven cleaners) and volatile organic compounds. Prolonged contact with these cleaners can cause skin problems and fumes are breathed in by workers and patrons and can ultimately cause respiratory diseases. When these materials are flushed down drains, they enter the sewage system, affecting water quality downstream of the discharge pipes.

In addition, most common cleaning products are sold in ready-to-use diluted form. A recent study by Proctor and Gamble found that much of the environmental impact of cleaning products is in the packaging itself.

The chemicals used for insect and rodent control by exterminator services are even worse. These contain neurotoxins which do their work on the pests but can adversely affect humans as well.



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There are many less toxic and biodegradable cleaning products available. However, it's important to read the labels and study the spec sheets of these products. Some may turn out to be not very "natural" while others may not adequately destroy bacteria. Here are some general recommendations:

- Buy in Bulk. Buy cleaning products in bulk concentrate form and dilute them yourself. This will save you money and reduce the number of throw-away containers. Many vendors will take the bulk containers back and re-use them.
- Green Seal. Look for products that meet the Green Seal Environmental Standards for Lodging Properties (www.greenseal.org)
- Solvents. Replace any petroleum-based solvents with citrus-based ones.
- Glass Cleaners. Vinegar-based solutions can replace commercial glass cleaners containing ammonia.
- Disinfectants. For food preparation surfaces, hydrogen peroxide is an alternative to chlorine-based cleaners. For other applications, you may be able to use chlorine-free surface cleaners.
- Oven Cleaners. Most commercial oven cleaners are extremely toxic and contain either caustic soda or ethanolamine as the active ingredient. Instead, try baking soda, borax or just scouring pads and soap.
- Floor Cleaners. In most cases, a broom and wet mop are all that you need. Vegetable-oil and water-based cleaners are good alternatives to petroleum-based ones.
- Insecticides. Instead of the strong chemicals and baits used to prevent or quickly eliminate pest problems, try Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is an alternative "low-tech" method of pest control emphasizing simple, low-cost prevention methods that minimize access to food, water and hiding places. Good sanitation and filling any floor or wall gaps is the first line of defense.

Alternative pest control products use natural ingredients and high water ratios to reduce environmental risk. Look for products whose active ingredients are citrus-based, such as d-Limonene. Non-toxic bait traps that use vegetable



material are also safer. If a stronger chemical is required, a 'least-toxic' alternative is boric acid.

- Cleaning and Sanitation Consultants. Work with established firms in designing cleaning, sanitation and pest control practices that minimize environmental and health impacts. Vendors such as Ecolab and JohnsonDiversey are beginning to develop environmentally-sound products and practices.



CLEARING THE AIR

Chicago has recently joined most other large cities in instituting an immediate smoking ban in restaurants and phasing in a ban in bars over the next several years. This is a huge step forward in improving the indoor air quality for restaurant patrons and staff.

If you live in a city that does not yet have a smoking ban, consider implementing one voluntarily. It will clear the air and reward you with happy employees and customers.

