

Sustainability in carpet care

Science and your own carpet cleaning company can have a positive impact on health and the environment.

By Roger McFadden

We are facing major challenges to the sustainability of our planet and people.

We are constantly reminded of the impact of climate change, and that many living systems on this planet are in decline; forests, wetlands, fisheries and soil are all being depleted faster than they can be replenished.

At the same time, we are experiencing an astounding increase in population, garbage and pollution.

There is also an emerging threat that may be more challenging than all of these combined. Harmful chemicals are accumulating and persisting in our environment.

Sustainable options

Today, carpet cleaning business owners, managers and cleaning technicians need to ask themselves about the ways they can have a positive impact on health and the environment.

A great starting point is replacing traditional products with more sustainable options.

For instance, some carpet manufacturers are adopting more sustainable approaches by offering carpet made with recycled materials so they can be collected at the end of life to be used for the manufacturing of new carpet.

This kind of smart thinking is providing our world with more sustainable product options, resulting in companies that are healthier from an environmental, financial and social standpoint.



Cleaning companies are also creating healthier work environments by introducing sustainable carpet cleaning products.

They are safer than traditional cleaning products for human and environmental health without sacrificing performance. There are many high-performance professional carpet cleaning alternatives, formulated without harsh alkalis, aggressive or flammable solvents — the lack of which are safer for cleaning professionals and building occupants alike.

Your own investigation

When considering sustainable carpet care products for your company, there are multiple areas to look at to ensure you are getting the best results while utilizing the most sustainable processes and product options on the market.

Areas to consider include a product's performance, sustainable attributes and cost of use.

Professional cleaning product manufacturers are formulating carpet cleaning products using green chemistry methods.

Green chemistry is an innovative and economically driven approach toward global sustainability.

Products are designed and developed in order to reduce or eliminate the use of substances hazardous to human and environmental health.

In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency's Design for the Environment (DfE) program helps formulators reduce the negative impact of cleaning products on human and environmental health at the design stage rather than waiting until products enter the supply chain.



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The cost of sustainability

It's important to know that sustainable carpet cleaning products are price competitive to conventional carpet cleaning products.

In fact, many sustainable carpet cleaning products are highly concentrated and have a lower total cost of use than conventional products.

Many conventional cleaning products are formulated with ingredients that are derived from oil.

The cost of oil has been increasing at an all-time high, which increases the cost of these ingredients.

Sustainable cleaning products formulated with green chemistry methods use sustainable ingredients that are based on readily renewable resources, which in many cases cost equal to or less than the oil-derived ingredients.

— R.M.

Beyond chemistry

In addition to purchasing sustainable carpet cleaners, proper and frequent carpet cleaning is a key ingredient to maintaining a carpet.

Following are tips to best prolong the life of carpet while implementing sustainable carpet cleaning practices. These are specific to a company looking to implement green cleaning and sustainability procedures:

- High-traffic carpet areas should be vacuumed daily, using vacuums certified by the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI) Seal of Approval and its Green Label certification process.
- Carpet should be regularly cleaned.
- Cleaning staff should prevent greases, oils and contaminants extracted from carpet from being discharged onto the ground or into water.
- Wastewater collected during the cleaning process should be filtered before discharging it into a sanitary sewer.
- Avoid overwetting or using too much detergent when cleaning carpet. This can cause re-soiling, attract dust mites and promote mold growth.
- Limit the use of disinfectants. Disinfectants contain active ingredients that are inherently toxic to human and aquatic life and are not the most effective in getting the best cleaning results. Disinfectants have been designed and approved for use on hard surfaces and are not widely approved or effective on carpet.
- Avoid products marketed for sanitizing carpet. Their claims are limited and do not kill a wide range of disease-causing microbes. Active ingredients in sanitizers can harm the environment and damage carpet fibers. Use of products that claim to sanitize carpet can create a false sense of protection.
- Select energy-efficient carpet cleaning equipment.
- Eliminate toxic substances from your cleaning operations.
- Select high-performance sustainable carpet cleaning products that are independently third-party certified.
- Educate your cleaning professionals about the value of using sustainable cleaning products, equipment, practices and procedures.

Preventive measures

To prolong the life of existing carpet further, install walk-off matting at building entrances to capture tracked-in soils and keep them clean.

Quick removal of carpet spills and stains will prevent them from penetrating and damaging the carpet fibers, backing and adhesives.

There are solvents used in some cleaning products that can harm the stain resistance and colorfastness of a carpet. Testing a cleaning product in a conspicuous area of the carpet will assure that the product is safe for carpet.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says the most effective way to prevent the spread of disease is to properly wash our hands with soap and water. This same principle is relevant when it comes to carpet cleaning.

The most effective way to control the spread of disease from carpet is to properly clean them on a regular basis.

End of life

When a carpet reaches its end of life, you can continue implementing sustainability practices by recycling old carpet to keep them out of landfills.

You can also choose new carpet manufactured with high levels of recycled content that can be recovered at the end of life to be recycled or re-manufactured.

Not only are carpet products and the products that clean them becoming more sustainable, but the cleaning practices and companies providing cleaning services are becoming more sustainable as well.

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Invest in the future

Investors are demanding that companies adopt better environmental and social responsibility policies because it will be better for business.

Innovative companies look beyond government regulations and seek out opportunities in reducing and eliminating toxic chemicals from their products, supply chain and workplace. They know that hazardous chemicals cost far more to use and dispose of than safer chemicals.

Building owners and managers are also looking for ways to gain LEED certification for their buildings and eliminate toxic substances from their workplace.

A building can become an unhealthy place with compromised indoor air quality when soils, bio-pollutants, toxins and pollutants are allowed to accumulate.

When carpet and other cleaning products are properly formulated using green chemistry methods and properly used by cleaning professionals, they will perform and reduce bio-pollutants, allergens and other unhealthy contaminants.

In addition, sustainable carpet and cleaning products and practices can extract and remove unwanted substances and minimize their impact on human and environmental health.

Effective cleaning will preserve the value of buildings and fixtures, promote productivity, project a positive image to building occupants and allow people to live comfortably, securely and productively indoors.

Sustainable cleaning and carpet care is an insurance policy and the best investment you can make for the effective management of an indoor environment.

— R.M.