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'Green' cleaning products just as effective as others

By Laurie Wink
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MICHIGAN CITY—Joe and Tammy Nelmar are out to change the mindset that strong-smelling chemicals are the only ones that can clean effectively. New-generation “green chemicals” are often colorless and odorless but every bit as effective as conventional cleaning products, according to the Nelmars, owners of Great

Lakes Supply & Chemical Inc., 1001 Eastwood Road.

They have served the “jansan industry” — janitorial and cleaning businesses — for 20 years. Now they're working on educating their customers about cleaning products that do the job without doing a number on human health and the environment.

“The new products have to be used differently, and a lot of them don't have all

the odors and color added. A lot of the frills are deliberately engineered out,” Joe said.

Products that have earned “Green Seal certification” have passed tests conducted by Green Seal, a non-profit independent organization, to prove they are safe for humans, environmentally preferable, equally effective as other same-use products and competitively priced.

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Laurie Wink/The News-Dispatch

Joe and Tammy Nelmar.

Green

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Joe Nelmar compares the Green Seal to the Underwriters Laboratory product safety certification.

The Nelmars say the new eco-friendly product lines are superior to those marketed some 20 years ago, when worker safety and environmental issues emerged.

"Early attempts to make green chemicals failed miserably because they didn't work," Joe Nelmar said. "They could make them safe, but they were more expensive and not effective."

Both cost and safety are important to Great Lakes Supply's customers, who are in education, health care and commercial and industrial buildings. The company services the Northwest Indiana and Southwest Michigan areas with some 4,000 cleaning products and cleaning equipment. They

want to demystify what can be a daunting task for customers who want to select more green certified materials.

The Nelmars have not replaced their traditional cleaning products but have added 38 new green chemical ones.

"We have a green product that can substitute for almost any product we sell," Tammy said.

Some non-green cleaning solutions can be quite toxic — particularly wash-room cleaners and floor strippers. For example, the Nelmars said Lysol, a frequently used bathroom cleaner, contains diethylene glycol, a known toxin. The alternative green product, ES51 from the Enviro-Solutions line, doesn't contain diethylene glycol. It's also biodegradable and environmentally safe.

Joe talked about a cleaning contractor in South Bend who had been using

a traditional floor degreaser. The man suffered from arthritis symptoms that went away when he started using a green product. Joe said the product that gave the man health problems is Husky 900, an industrial strength degreaser containing butyl.

"It's the 2-Butoxyethanol that's the real tough one here," Joe said about the degreaser. "The replacement from Enviro-Solutions is their ES75, with no butyl.

No matter how toxic the standard products are, switching to a new, unknown item can be difficult, according to Joe.

"If you're supposed to clean a building and you have something that doesn't work, you're going to catch hell," Joe said. "We're helping them to adapt to replacing the old with the new."

Green products are sold in concentrated amounts so packages are smaller

and are biodegradable.

"Why pay someone else to add the water for you?" Joe said.

The Nelmars have added a biodegradable line of bags made in the Chicago area. They sell thousands of cases of garbage bags each month.

"We're trying to become the area experts on green," Joe said. "It's a value-added service."

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