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## Cleaning Products Stay Within The Budget

**Trying out a pilot program with green cleaning products helped one New Jersey school district in deciding on district wide implementation.**

*By Anne Vazquez*

With more than 3,000 students in the Tenafly, NJ district, Vincent Benenati, supervisor of buildings and grounds, was looking for a greener way to clean. His concern for occupant comfort and health were at the forefront, but Benenati also had to keep an eye firmly fixed on the budget. A pilot program helped him test the waters.



### **What is your background?**

I am the supervisor of buildings and grounds at Tenafly Board of Education and a certified educational facilities manager. I've been in the facility management profession for 14 years and currently manage six schools and one administration building.

### **When (and how) did you become interested in environmental issues?**

As a facilities manager, I'm always interested in environmental issues, because I'm dealing with children. It's always at the forefront.

At the start of this school year, I launched a pilot program using green cleaning products. This included all cleaning chemicals and dispensers-washroom cleaner, degreaser, general purpose cleaner, neutral floor cleaner, and glass cleaner. Once we took this policy district wide, we went out to public bid and requested a service provider with third party certified green clean products.

### **What results from the pilot program led you to implement green cleaning throughout the school district?**

I gauged the general satisfaction of occupants. The real satisfaction we're finding now is from the staff members who actually use the products. They say the odors are much less offensive. As we put the entire district on the program and get everyone more involved, we'll see a lot of happy parents and teachers.

### **In what other areas have you implemented green solutions?**

About 18 months ago, we entered into an agreement with an energy management company, and we have found substantial savings in usage and costs. We computerized our entire heating system, so when no one is in the building, the heat turns down. And right before school starts, the heat comes back on. We try to be as efficient as possible without causing any discomfort to the people in the building. It has really been an excellent program.

That was the key when we considered the energy management program. We were very much in favor of it, but we didn't want people calling to complain all the time about being too cold or too hot, and we haven't had that at all.

### **Do you think the energy management program implemented in the district gave others insight into the green cleaning project?**

It certainly didn't hurt. They saw that we did a program like that and it came in at

such a success that it was well worth it to try another one.

**Why was the decision made to pursue green cleaning? Were there any complaints that might have spurred you to pursue this action?**

There are certain cleaning chores that have to be done while children are in the buildings. If we can use something that's 100% safe, certified safe by a third party, and does the same job for the same price, it's a win-win situation.

I wouldn't say I heard complaints as much as I would say there were questions asked. People would ask about cleaning products they saw being used and sometimes asked to see the MSDS sheet on the product. Now if they see the building is all green, just knowing that is going to give them a sense of ease.

Most questions came from staff members and teachers. But some parents, if their child had asthma or something, would ask what we're using during the day.

**What was the reaction of upper management to the decision to embrace the principles of sustainable design in this project?**

I brought in several companies with green products, and we met with the principal of the pilot program school, the head custodian there, and the district business administrator. It was nice having them involved from the beginning, so they knew what we were looking to do. All the questions were asked in those meetings: Will the products work as well? Will the cost be doable?

Once we got past that, it worked out really well. We've had a lot of support.

**What was the vendor selection process like? Did you feel limited?**

Actually, I found that when I started looking into it, there was a huge market for green products. I went to vendors that we've used for years and had them come in and present their green products. We also did a lot of investigation on the Internet looking into these products and the certifications.

**Have you applied for-or achieved-LEED certification from the USGBC for this project?**

We're waiting until we put the whole system in to see where we'll go with that. We requested in our bid for this project a letter from Green Seal certifying the green products. So if we go forward, we'll have that in place.

**What did you learn from this project?**

I learned that we should keep our eyes open, because there's a huge supply out there of environmentally friendly and cost saving items.

Facilities managers should be open minded about what's available, and they have to do their homework.

**What was the most professionally rewarding aspect of this project?**

The most rewarding aspect of it was keeping the students and the staff as safe as possible. Our number one priority is to keep everyone safe.

**Are you looking toward any other green solutions for your facilities?**

We're thinking about a bid for green floor care products like wax and stripper. We're probably going to go in that direction in the next few months. I decided I could address floor care at any time, because the floors are waxed in the summer.

Looking further out, I think we're going to see the use of some solar energy. The energy issue is huge. The cost is really tough on schools with fixed budgets. With

the cost of gas and electric rising substantially, every year we have to look at any avenue available to save money.

Questions about this project can be sent to Vincent Benenati at [vbenenati@tenafly.k12.nj.us](mailto:vbenenati@tenafly.k12.nj.us).

To share your "green solutions," send an e-mail to [schwartz@groupc.com](mailto:schwartz@groupc.com).

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