



City of San Jose

The Search For Safer Cleaning Products

Steve Lopez, Building Services Supervisor for the City of San Jose, has been involved for over 25 years in the building maintenance field, both with hands-on experience and in management. He has always stressed the importance of worker safety, and wanted to take a fresh look at products used in his department.

As a result he asked the Janitorial Pollution Prevention Project team to review products that were being used by his custodians. This review led Mr. Lopez to decide that some of these products exposed his staff to unacceptable health risks. In hopes of finding alternatives for the City, he offered to assist the JP4 team in their search to find effective environmentally preferable cleaning products.



IDEAL TEST CREW

Mr. Lopez had already established a test crew to evaluate all new products considered for City use. With plenty of prior experience assessing new products, the five member Main Library cleaning crew made an ideal test group. In three months they worked with project members and tested over 30 products for a range of cleaning functions including: General Purpose, Toilet Bowl, Tile/Bath, Glass, Disinfectant, Metal Polish, and Graffiti Remover.



WHAT MADE TESTING A SUCCESS

Weekly meetings were a necessity for the crew to discuss successes and failures throughout the test process. Although the cleaning staff was accustomed to evaluating products, there were new things to consider when testing "green" cleaners.

For example, green products sometimes need more surface exposure time to be effective. Test crew members were at first reluctant to use products that could negatively impact their productivity. However, the weekly crew meeting offered a forum to discuss this issue, and the crew members soon established a change in their daily cleaning routine to make the products work better.



The crew decided that when using toilet cleaners, for example, each employee should apply the cleaner in the toilet bowl at the beginning of a restroom routine. The custodian would then proceed to empty trash cans and restock paper products before returning to scrub the toilets. After three months of similar routine changes and evaluations, the test crew established a list of 19 environmentally preferable cleaning products that work effectively.

EXPECTED RESULTS

As a result of these tests, the City of San Jose is considering a number of safer cleaning products. Switching to these alternative cleaners would primarily reduce the use of:

- Butoxy Ethanol (poisons blood, liver, and kidneys);
- Sodium Hydroxide (corrosive to eyes and skin);
- Alkyl Phenol Ethoxylates (affect hormone systems); and
- Hydrochloric Acid (corrosive to eyes and skin).

The project team estimates that changing away from products with these ingredients will decrease the Main Library's hazardous chemical use by at least 1300 pounds per year.