



Stanford University

Student Housing Services

Quest for Safer Residential Cleaning

Stanford University is committed to strong programs of accident and injury prevention and to complying with all environmental and health and safety laws. The first three guiding principles in their Injury and Illness Prevention Plan commit to protecting the health and safety of Stanford University faculty, staff and students; providing safe workplaces for faculty, staff and students; and providing information to faculty, staff, and students about health and safety hazards. In line with that commitment, Heather Perry, Environmental Health and Safety Coordinator for Student Housing Services contacted the Janitorial Products Pollution Prevention Project to learn more about safety and health related risks regarding products used by the janitors in her department.

THE HOUSING LAYOUT

Student Housing Services has a staff of nearly 70 full-time janitors that clean and maintain 3.2 million square feet of residential living space for over 9,000 students. There are 11 cleaning crews comprised of a crew lead and 4-7 janitors, each with their own challenges. One crew of 6 works with the row houses and struggle with the inconvenience of lugging supplies from house to house daily, not to mention the challenges of cleaning fixtures over 50 years old. Another crew maintains the common living areas for graduate housing, leaving it up to the student to clean their own room. It isn't until a student vacates a room that the cleaning crew comes in and does a thorough cleaning. With such variances in cleaning needs it is difficult to have everyone use a simple list of cleaning products.

At the beginning of the year Ms. Perry worked with Tom Barron of the project team to review 80% of the products used by the 11 cleaning crews. Of the 50+ products reviewed Ms. Perry arranged for the cleaning crews to completely stop using a dozen products with serious health and/or environmental risks. Among those eliminated were products with ozone depleting substances, cancer causing ingredients and reproductive hazards. Although it was easy to make these initial changes, further product adjustments would prove to be more challenging.

ONE CREW AT A TIME

With no formal central purchasing policy in place for the Student Housing Services staff, it is difficult to make changes across the board in products used by the cleaning crews. To work around this issue Ms. Perry focused on working with one group at a time. She asked for volunteer crews to test an array of environmentally preferable products in hopes that initial group successes would serve as example to those who would follow later. Initially, two crews of 6 janitors tested products for restroom, window and general purpose cleaning. As other crews learned about the testing process two more volunteered for the process.

SAFETY AWARENESS TRAINING

In addition to looking for safer products Ms. Perry and other management staff continually look for ways to increase safety awareness for and with the employees. Regular informal training sessions are held twice a month with nearly half of the meetings directly related to product safety issues. Pocket sized bilingual cheat sheets with dilution ratios, mixing instructions and safety precautions are provided to staff trained to mix from concentrate. On July 29th, Ms. Perry attended a half-day workshop where she learned how to conduct her own technical product reviews among other things. Since then, Ms. Perry has advised against the use of a few new products based on safety risks and is searching for possible alternatives.

The project team estimates that each cleaning crew that decides to switch to the suggested alternative products will reduce their handling of hazardous ingredients by about 4,200 pounds per year.