



What's Needed Next?

Environmentally preferable purchasing is an important step toward reducing the impacts of building maintenance products upon the janitorial user, building occupant, and the environment in general.

There are three major problem areas that need to be addressed jointly by environmental professionals, janitorial product suppliers, and the specialty chemicals manufacturing industry.

We invite you to become involved. Tell your suppliers, associates, and anyone else who will listen what your opinions are.

We Need Better MSDSs

To be at all useful for making health and environmental decisions, material safety data sheets need to voluntarily list all ingredients in the product, not just those mandated by regulations. The relative quantity of each ingredient also needs to be stated, although providing a range such as "15% to 20%" is sufficient for most purposes.

In addition, printed MSDSs need to be clearly written, well organized, and legible. About a tenth of all MSDSs we have evaluated either cannot be read because of small or distorted type, or are hard to use because some of the information is in non-standard locations.

Finally, we encourage all product suppliers to publish their MSDSs on the internet. Direct and instant access is far better than waiting weeks or months to receive a requested data sheet.

We Need Better Technical Information

We suggest that vendors begin providing more information to janitors who wish to use their products. For example, we think that product literature should emphasize:

- How to store, mix, and use products;
- How to avoid incompatibilities with other products;
- How to easily access the supplier's customer service system with health, safety, and environmental questions; and
- How to properly dispose of unused product, wastes, and containers.

We Need Better Product Labels

We encourage nation-wide development of standard janitorial product labels like those now being used for food packaging. Key information to display includes explicit identification of dangers that the product poses, a list of toxic ingredients, recommended personal protective equipment, and guidance for proper emergency response. Containers should also explain where to get more information.

Adopted from a forthcoming article in [Pollution Prevention Review](#) by Thomas Barron, Debbie Raphael, and Lara Sutherland.