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The Use of Green Cleaning Products in Schools

Green cleaning generally refers to “the use of products and services that have a lesser or reduced impact on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose.”¹ There is a growing trend around the country requiring schools and government buildings to use environmentally friendly cleaning products.² The use of chemicals in schools is essential for maintaining a clean and safe learning environment. Yet many chemicals in cleaning products can be harmful to human health and the environment.³

In an effort to promote spending on environmentally on

environmental pollutants.”⁶

The health of school employees is also at risk under the use of general cleaning products. Roughly 2.8 million janitors nation wide use these chemicals daily, and estimated custodial chemical injuries costs around “\$25 million each year in lost time and workers compensation.”⁷ Washington State estimated 6 percent of janitors suffer a “job related injury from chemical exposure to cleaning products every year.”⁸

State Requirements for Green Cleaning Products

Currently, 20 states have either state mandates or guidelines that dictate the purchasing of green cleaning products in either state facilities or specifically in schools.⁹ The policies in each state, however, differ greatly. Of the 20 states that require green cleaning products, six have passed legislation at the state level, ten have executive orders, and the remaining four have either state contracts or purchasing guidelines that facilities must follow.¹⁰ Fifteen of the twenty states have guidelines that require states specifically to use products currently certified by *Green Seal* organization (a non profit that certifies products).¹¹

Vermont

Under Executive Orders 02 04 and 14 03, state facilities in Vermont must adhere to specific guidelines when considering bids from companies in response to a request for proposal.¹² The guidelines in Vermont currently only

and New Hampshire, for purchasing green cleaning products, programs, equipment, and supplies.¹⁴ Vermont also allows

preferable cleaning and sanitizing products.”²³ The Executive Order also required the Department of Administrative Services to “provide standards and guidance to state agencies in connection with the implementation of the green cleaning procurement policies

increase in production and competition on the supply side in response to the increased demand."³²

Conclusion

It is clear the growing trend among states has been to implement a policy that requires most state buildings, including public schools, to use products that are better for the environment, for the people exposed to them, and can be more cost effective. While Vermont's current executive orders require the use of Environmentally Preferable Products, the lack of guidelines as to what specific products are to be used leave room for interpretation of what products can be used.³³ To address this issue, most other states that have implemented policies regarding the use of green cleaning products in state facilities have also amended their legislation to include guidelines that require the use of products certified by a third party organization, such as *Green Seal*, or *EcoLogo*.³⁴

Prepared in response to a request by Senator Virginia "Ginny" V. Lyons of Chittenden County by Luke Martin, Julie Seger, and Kristen Skager, under the supervision of graduate student Kate Fournier and Professor Anthony Gierzynski on February 2, 2011.

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