COVER STORY

In Good Company

Suddenly, housekeeping has the ear of executives bent on 'greening' their facilities

Email the HS editors.

You already know that “green” cleaning programs help to reduce the negative impact cleaning can have on the environment, facilities and building-occupant health. There is also another benefit to going green: You can become a valuable player on your organization’s sustainability* team.

Building owners, corporate executives and various department managers are turning to the cleaning management team for help in polishing the corporate image when it comes to environmental leadership. Meanwhile, organizations can earn nationally recognized “green” accreditation from groups such as the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). Environmentally friendly cleaning products and practices translate into “points” toward accreditation. Organizations that can document occupant health and safety improvement, reduce energy and water use, help protect local ecosystems and conserve natural resources earn the USGBC’s LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) points that lead to a facility being certified as a LEED certified, Silver, Gold or Platinum facility. Organizations can, in turn, leverage their green sustainability laurels in marketing campaigns aimed at local civic leaders, prospective tenants and building occupants, in general.

“Cleaning is not generally a CEO-level issue, but sustainability is,” says Michael Arny, president of the Leonardo Academy, a non-profit environmental organization. “Managers can talk to any level of a company, up to the top. They’re delivering something that many CEO types value.” He adds that the number of building owners and CEOs interested in applying for awards is growing — so far, 25 buildings have earned LEED for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB) status (134 more projects are in the works).

The LEED-EB rating system and certification recognizes building owners, managers and operators for their efforts in reducing the environmental impact of their facilities, and operating buildings using green and sustainable products and procedures.

A significant portion of LEED-EB points (13 out of 32 to be certified) that can be earned toward certification relate to the cleaning mission: using environmentally preferable cleaning products; recycling; using water and energy more efficiently; and integrating pest management and waste management programs. As the housekeeping manager, you play a substantial role in getting your facility certified.

Ahead of the game

Many cleaning departments already are using environmentally preferable, or green, products and procedures — regardless of their organizations’ interest in LEED-EB certification. Emory University’s building services department already was using some Green Seal-approved products when the organization’s officials launched its first LEED-EB project. Green Seal is a non-profit organization that certifies environmentally preferable products.

“We had already begun identifying chemicals that we were using and replacing them with more environmentally friendly products ... indoor air quality issues had already come up because of occupants being sensitive to certain chemicals,” says Cecil King, assistant director of building services. “We had a great head start [toward meeting LEED-EB requirements].”

Emory already has several LEED-NC (LEED for New Construction) buildings. The success and positive
feedback received from LEED-NC projects drove officials to work toward a LEED-EB certification. LEED-NC offers only one point that affects cleaning departments (entryway systems), compared to LEED-EB’s 13 points. When university officials sought LEED-EB Gold certification for the Goizueta business school building King and her operation got involved.

Early on in the project, the university’s building commissioning manager arranged a meeting to explain the university’s involvement with LEED and what the role of the building services department would be.

“[The LEED project] forced the cleaning department to work with other entities and the facility management division,” King says. “It forced me to look at the overall picture in maintaining buildings and recognize my responsibility, [and] how my team and I needed to get involved at all levels of our organization. We need to work with campus planning, architects, project managers, contractors and customers as a team to not only build and/or redesign buildings, but also to maintain these buildings being environmentally conscious and sensitive.”

As a member of the facility team, King approves and helps specify surfaces and building materials that are easier to clean and maintain using the department’s LEED-approved (LEED-EB incorporates the Green Seal standard) chemicals and tools.

She adds that the campus faculty, staff and community have an “overall higher conscious level of our duties” as a department. Calling attention to the work and contribution of the building services staff when it comes to environmental improvements helps with the department’s overall credibility within the community and organization … and also helps shatter some of the less-complimentary stereotypes attached to the cleaning mission.

For example, the building services department is featured in a color brochure spotlighting Emory’s LEED-certified buildings. The brochure was distributed at this year’s Greenbuild International Conference & Expo, sponsored by the USGBC. Attendees include architects, building owners, engineers and facility managers, among others.

“The brochure for the Greenbuild show shows a picture of the matting by the doors, shiny floors and a picture of Goizueta,” says Robin Smith, building commissioning manager. “It should bring a lot of attention to the cleaning aspects of Gold EB.”

A presentation in credibility
To highlight housekeeping’s contributions to LEED, University of California-Santa Barbara (UCSB) custodial services superintendent Byron Sandoval created a PowerPoint presentation about green cleaning that is available on the UCSB Sustainability Web site — http://sustainability.ucsb.edu.

The presentation explains how custodial services got involved in LEED. In 2004, the chancellor of the University of California-Santa Barbara authored a “Green Building Policy,” which stated that the university faculty and staff should continue to monitor and evaluate rating systems for new and existing green buildings to ensure that the campus makes use of the most environmentally sound and cost-effective rating system available.

“I did get appointed by the big boss [for the project], but [under the 2004 policy] it is my job to look for environmentally friendly products,” says Sandoval. “I had already started looking at what we were using closely about one and a half years ago.”

Like Emory, UCSB started with LEED-NC projects. The USGBC is currently reviewing the university’s first LEED-EB project — Girvetz Hall.

Sandoval works on the Girvetz Hall project with the university’s sustainability coordinator, Perrin Pellegrin.
Sandoval researches products, tools and equipment for the project.

“Byron and I had meetings about once a week,” Pellegrin says. “I would go suggesting things and he would say ‘yes,’ or ‘no.’ He was also researching things for me. He knows the history of the custodians and what is best for them.”

Sandoval is a loyal customer to the chemical company that has provided him product for more than 12 years. He was hesitant to switch suppliers without looking into his options. Sandoval and Pellegrin met with the company and told representatives about LEED-EB and the need for Green Seal-approved products. Their efforts paid off: The manufacturer came back with an approved all-purpose cleaner, floor neutralizer and glass cleaner.

The next step: Get cleaning workers on-board with new chemicals and tools. Sandoval predicted that implementing big changes could result in some resistance from employees, so he made the transition as easy as possible by explaining Green Seal to employees.

“I told them that I am not trying to save the world or anything, but I care about my employees and I wanted them to use safer chemicals,” he says.

Sandoval also works with many departments just by being a part of the UCSB sustainability committee and is considered the campus “cleaning expert.” He says he also benchmarks with nearby Anaheim and California state universities interested in his green program.

**Spread the word**

Signage in two buildings on the Emory campus indicates that “environmentally sound products” are being used within the buildings — part of an ongoing effort to promote the department’s green-cleaning efforts.

“The occupants are very pleased,” says Nancy Bayly, associate director of capital projects and facilities planning. “This knowledge instantly makes them feel as if they are in a healthier work environment. The occupants are proud to be working in LEED-designed and maintained buildings.”

King says the LEED program creates a partnership between building occupants and building services employees. Occupants now have an interest in and more support for building services workers and what they do.

“It helps customers, knowing that frontline employees are properly trained with the use of materials,” she says. “There is more customer interaction. They want to know more about changes that have occurred.”

Talking with building occupants about any type of project will help cleaning managers get their support during the implementation process. “It’s a matter of doing outreach,” Sandoval says. “We sent out e-mails and met with [Girvetz Hall occupants]. Once we explained to them what was going to be different [it was fine]. They hear change is coming and expect [the worst].”

“Anytime you can get a national organization like the USGBC that gives documentation of how we care for our buildings ... we’re taken more seriously, [and considered] to have a greater level of performance,” says Emory’s Smith. “It puts us a step up on the ladder.”

**Taking the LEED**

Through benchmarking with organizations like Emory and UCSB, and using resources like the USGBC and Green Seal, cleaning managers need not wait for their organization to launch a LEED-EB project. Arny says managers who are knowledgeable about green cleaning and sustainable practices can spearhead future LEED-EB buildings. At least managers can start with researching ways they can help earn points by incorporating environmentally preferable cleaning practices.
“Because sustainability is mostly about paying attention to what you’re doing — not about spending money — there is a tremendous opportunity for cleaning managers to educate their organizations about the ideas and benefits of sustainability,” says Arny. “Compared with other [credit] options, cleaning is the lowest cost area to earn points. Suddenly, cleaning people are at the head of the line.”