



A Gibb Knowledge Base Article

Certiably Green

With new cleaning products claiming to be “green” or “environmentally-friendly” everyday, it is difficult to decide which products are truly better and which are just watered-down versions of the same old chemicals. That’s becoming easier as new certification processes follow the wave of environmental awareness. These new certifications, headed up by the U. S. Green Building Council (USGBC), are providing tangible green standards for cleaning products, cleaning processes, and building operations.

Currently, the most developed certification systems come from the Green Seal organization and the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system created by the USGBC. Green Seal is a non-profit group whose mission is to “achieve a more sustainable world by promoting environmentally responsible production, purchasing, and products.” Green Seal has created a certification program in which a seal is awarded to products with low environmental impact. In addition to many other product categories, Green Seal has created entire certification systems specifically targeted at industrial and institutional cleaners. Products that attain the Green Seal generally have the least negative impact on the Indoor Environmental Quality (IEQ), an assessment of indoor air quality and the physical and psychosocial causes of health impairment and stress. When a building’s IEQ is improved, a likely improvement in the health and well-being of its occupants follows.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system certifies entire buildings as green if they meet environmental design, construction, and operational standards. LEED has recently launched a rating system for buildings that are more than two years old called LEED-EB (Existing Buildings). The LEED-EB rating system, which is based on a point scale, places significant importance on the cleaning and maintenance of a building. Categories that the system addresses include building cleaning and maintenance operations, cleaning chemical usage and storage. Indoor environmental quality is a prominent goal of LEED-EB, with guidelines to “establish good indoor air quality and eliminate, reduce, and manage the sources of indoor pollutants.” There are other LEED rating systems as well, notably LEED-NC (New Construction and major renovation) and LEED-CI (Commercial Interiors).

Since 1992, the Carpet and Rug Institute (CRI) has also been certifying products that, according to their testing process, are environmentally preferable. The CRI’s “Green Label” testing program focuses on vacuum cleaners and their impact on a building’s IAQ. The primary criteria for Green Label certification are a vacuum’s ability to effectively remove soil, maintain carpet quality, and capture particulate matter. *Continued on page 2*



page 2 of Certifiably Green

Filtration is performed by High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters, which typically remove 99.97% of particles down to 3 microns in size. Even with all this additional capability, vacuum cleaners with the Green Label certification work without sacrificing quality and performance, and can make one of the largest positive impacts on indoor air quality.

There are circumstances in which rating systems of broader scope (such as LEED) acknowledge other rating systems. For instance, Green Seal certified cleaning products and Green Label vacuums, along with environmentally preferable or green cleaning techniques, can help your building earn points towards a LEED rating. It is important to note that the words “environmentally preferable” typically refer to products and practices that are likely to obtain certification (awaiting the development of relevant certification standards), as opposed to “green” which applies to those certified by an appropriate authority or rating system.

The “green wave” is here. By being knowledgeable about important certifications and standards such as Green Seal, LEED, and Green Label you can make sure that your maintenance program and/or building service contractor is using products and practices that promote a healthy internal and external environment.

