

## Cleaning and Your Health

There is a strong relationship between the quality of your building's cleaning and maintenance services and the health of your building's occupants. Every year you invest a hefty sum into the cleaning and maintenance of your building. Did you realize that this investment had an impact upon your health? Understand the ways that cleaning goes beyond image so that you and your building occupants or employees will have the healthiest environment possible.

The cleaning of surfaces in your building is one area in which special attention is required to prevent health issues. There are two major facets of the surface cleaning process: cleaning and sanitizing. It is important to understand that a countertop or floor tile can be clean of dirt, but could still pose a hazard to the health of building occupants. When a surface is sanitized, pathogens are destroyed or otherwise removed, bringing them to insignificant levels that pose no danger.

Sanitizing practices are especially important in bathrooms, lunchrooms, and break rooms. Microorganisms in these areas can cause infections and gastrointestinal upsets. Many Building Service Contractors (BSCs) do not pay proper attention to sanitization because they want to reduce costs and therefore be seen as a bargain to the customer. Make sure that whatever BSC you work with uses proper sanitization methods.

The products that are used to clean your building can also impact your health. Most cleaning products contain chemicals as active ingredients and can therefore release volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air while they are being used or stored. VOCs are chemicals that evaporate easily into the air and can have many adverse health affects. Depending on the toxicity of the VOCs and the length and level of exposure, the symptoms could be minor, such as skin and eye irritation, or they could be very serious, such as damage to the liver, kidney, or central nervous system. Make sure that your building service contractor uses cleaning products that emit the lowest possible quantities of volatile organic compounds, and applies them in ways that minimize their dispersion into the air.

Dust in the air can cause health issues such as irritation of lungs, eyes, nose, and throat, increased allergic reactions, and aggravate asthma. All of these symptoms can lower productivity and presenteeism. Proper cleaning can significantly reduce the concentration of dust particles and improve indoor air quality. Cleaning with vacuums that use High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters is one effective way to reduce air contamination. These vacuums filter and trap 99.97% of the dust moving through their mechanisms, while conventional vacuums spew greater quantities of dust into the air. *Continued on page 2*



*page 2 of Cleaning and Your Health*

Another way to maintain a healthy indoor environment is to use microfiber mop systems and dust cloths. Microfiber is a tightly woven material made from synthetic fibers that are less than 10 microns in diameter (approximately one tenth the width of a human hair). Microfiber-based cleaning products are able to reach into crevices and areas that normal cotton fibers cannot. This allows for deeper cleaning and better sanitation. Also, the static electrical charge and fiber density of microfiber allows it to trap and hold dust more effectively. Microfiber products also leave less cleaning solution behind, contributing to further improvement in indoor air quality.

Your health and the health of your building's occupants is a top priority. Make sure that your BSC uses the most health-conscious methods and products, as quality cleaning plays an important role in lowering health risks. By having a health-conscious building services plan, you'll increase presenteeism, mitigate healthcare costs, and increase occupant productivity and satisfaction.

Talk to your building service contractor about their cleaning methods and products. Let them know that you are concerned with the impact cleaning practices may have on your health.

