



## Facilitator — August/September 2011



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### What's Your Restaurant's Green Story?

Brian Garry

Make your business stand out in today's eco-conscious world

According to a Harris Interactive® survey, 84 percent of U.S. adults prefer to do business with a company that uses environmentally friendly products and practices. When coupled with the significant environmental and financial savings achieved by going "green," today's restaurant owners and operators can't afford not to incorporate sustainability and conservation into their business.

Fortunately, several solutions exist for restaurant professionals interested in reducing their carbon footprint without compromising their bottom line. Two options that immediately come to mind are incorporating more organic or locally grown food into the menu and using recyclable paper products.

However, not all green practices occur at the front of house. Many overlooked but equally significant solutions are available for back-of-house areas and lead to increased safety, cleanliness and waste reduction within the restaurant.

By championing business practices that conserve earth's natural resources, restaurant professionals can not only help protect the environment; they can also better protect their staff and guests while differentiating their business for today's green-savvy consumers.

#### Buy Green, Clean Green

There are two ways restaurant owners and operators can clean "green." The first way is to use environmentally friendly cleaning products. In the foodservice industry, cleaning chemicals are used everywhere—on dishes, tables, countertops, floors and windows—and often. Because food and cleanliness go hand-in-hand, restaurants use a ton of cleaning products, which can have negative effects on the environment and even the air quality within the restaurant.

To prevent this, restaurant owners and operators should only purchase and use products certified by thirdparty agencies such as Green Seal or the Environmental Protection Agency's Design for the Environment program. These agencies ensure that the products you're using meet strict performance and environmental requirements—like containing no carcinogens, mutagens or reproductive toxins and recyclable or recycled packaging.

The second way restaurant professionals can clean green is by making the process of cleaning more sustainable. When people first think "green," they typically envision environmentally friendly products. However, the way in which employees clean can be green too, and when done properly, can significantly reduce a restaurant's chemical and material waste.

One example is having employees use dilution control chemical dispensers each time they clean. This equipment ensures that the correct ratio of chemical to water is dispensed for cleaning, which limits waste and enhances performance so surfaces are cleaned and sanitized properly the first time around.

Dilution control systems are also safer for employees because they are completely enclosed, minimizing worker contact with concentrated chemicals. Solutions that restock cleaning chemicals via a service also significantly reduce the plastic and cardboard packaging waste versus receiving chemicals via distribution. Service providers can also supply bathroom paper, air care and soap to further reduce packaging waste.

Another way to clean “green” is by using microfiber cleaning systems. Microfibers are extremely thin threads of polyester and polyamide that, when woven together and made into mops or wipes, create a powerful cleaning tool. Because microfibers are so thin (about 100 times thinner than a single strand of human hair), they can penetrate and pick up as much as 99 percent of dirt, grease and other harmful bacteria that non-microfiber wipes and mops just move around, according to a study conducted by the University of California-Davis. As a result, microfiber cleaning systems mechanically remove and trap challenging pathogens such as E. coli, Listeria and Salmonella.

In addition, because of their efficiency, microfiber tools don't require a large amount of water for chemical dilution. In fact, microfiber allows employees to complete cleaning tasks in a fraction of the time with less effort, saving on labor and resources.

#### Stay Ahead of the Game

While there are many sustainable solutions available for cleaning, it's also important to plan ahead by creating a maintenance program that best limits the costs of cleaning on your staff, your bottom line and the environment.

One key item to include on the plan is routine deep cleaning of floors and other surfaces. Unlike surface cleaning, deep cleaning removes dirt and soil through high-pressure steam rinse or hot water extraction. It also removes the residue left from previously used cleaning chemicals, which dull surfaces and can attract soil. Favored by the Environmental Protection Agency, deep cleaning is a great way to reduce the use and waste of chemicals and helps restaurant surfaces stay cleaner longer, limiting replacement costs and protecting your investments.

Mat systems should also be part of your cleaning maintenance program. According to the Institute of Industrial Launderers, approximately 80 percent of dirt that enters the building comes through the front door. By strategically placing floor mats at entranceways and non-carpeted surfaces, QSR owners and operators can substantially reduce the amount of dirt tracked into their restaurants, thereby minimizing the effort and cleaning chemicals required to maintain floor surfaces, conserving water and energy.

#### Stay Trendy with Eco-Friendly Apparel

One of the most recent eco-friendly innovations is apparel made from post-consumer waste. Restaurant owners and operators can outfit employees in garments made of recycled polyester and wool. Created by diverting plastic bottles from landfills and transforming them into recycled fibers, these uniforms not only reduce landfill waste, but also conserve energy and water.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, apparel made from recycled material uses 66 percent less energy compared to the manufacturing of polyester fiber. The process also reduces water use by 90 percent and helps eliminate harmful air emissions.

Because of the benefits and popularity of eco-apparel, a number of options exist for restaurant professionals interested in incorporating green into their uniform programs. Many apparel providers offer garments that can be recycled once they reach the end of their wearable life—creating a “closed-loop” system and helping organizations enhance their environmental commitment. In addition, because of the nature of recycled polyester material—quick-drying, wrinkle-resistant, mildewproof and heat-resistant—many eco-friendly garments, including tuxedos, are machine-washable. This eliminates the need for expensive dry-cleaning services that can release harmful chemicals into the environment.

#### Blueprint for Success

With a little planning, incorporating green solutions into a restaurant's back of house is easy and yields significant financial and environmental savings. To streamline your campaign, partner with a facility services provider and corporate uniform provider experienced with the methods, products and processes you need to promote sustainability.

To limit waste, keep employees regularly trained on best practices for cleaning and maintaining surfaces. You can do this by hosting weekly or monthly training seminars or classes that address the importance of conservation.

By going green across all front and back-of-house areas, restaurant owners and operators can significantly reduce their environmental footprint—all while increasing employee morale and making a lasting impression with customers.

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