



# SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING QUICK GUIDE: SAFER GENERAL PURPOSE CLEANING PRODUCTS

*Ecology Center and Safer States' Sustainable Purchasing Quick Guides are a series of fact sheets highlighting sustainable purchasing options for high volume, high impact products. They are designed to help cities, counties, and states create safer communities through the purchase of more environmentally and socially conscious products.*

## Why General Purpose Cleaner?

Cleaning products are necessary to prevent illness and protect health. But sometimes, these products can pose hazards to employees and the environment. Toxic cleaning products can threaten indoor air quality, harming occupants. Some cleaning products contain chemicals known to cause cancer, asthma, respiratory and neurological damage and other serious health impacts. Environmental service staff experience higher levels of occupational asthma and respiratory diseases. Some cleaning formulations contain hazardous sterilants and disinfectants. Hazardous cleaning products can also require special disposal and training.

## Solutions: Municipalities Taking Action

There are plenty of safer cleaning products available to get the job done effectively at no additional cost. Many third party certifiers have identified safer alternatives for most major cleaning products, and municipalities are increasingly requiring green cleaning products for their operations. A good first step is to require the use of Green Seal or UL ECOLOGO certified products for carpet, window, all purpose, bathroom, and general floor care cleaning products. For example, the city of San Francisco [requires the use of products](#) certified by GreenSeal, UL Ecologo, EPA Safer Choice, or Cradle to Cradle Gold for general purpose cleaning throughout city operations. Santa Clara County, CA [requires all cleaning products](#) used within County-owned or operated facilities to be certified by a nationally recognized third party or approved by the procuring department as equivalent where possible.

## Benefits

Sustainable cleaning products protect the health of workers and building occupants, while keeping occupants safe from dirt and pathogens. Green cleaning practices can [reduce exposures by 70%](#) and offer opportunities for cost savings, for example, through reduced use of water and chemical use, safer work environments, and reduced need to lift heavy buckets. Many sustainable cleaning products cost the same or less than their toxic counterparts. Purchasing sustainable cleaning products can also reduce hazardous waste disposal, insurance, and liability costs.

## Tools and Resources

- [Ecology Center Directory of Sustainable Purchasing: General Cleaning](#); Directory of resources for sustainable purchasing of cleaning products
- [San Francisco Custodial Green Cleaning](#) and [SF Approved](#); Searchable database of products approved by the City of San Francisco or third-party entities and guidance on communication with custodial staff
- [Cleaning and Disinfection Purchasing Guide](#) from RPN; Guidance on third-party certifications for cleaning products