

June 26, 2008

SCOPING COMMENT SUMMARY: New Green Seal Environmental Standard for Residential Cleaning Services GS-49

The scoping phase of the Green Seal Environmental Standard for Residential Cleaning Services GS-49, standard development has been completed. This standard is being developed to define environmental performance criteria for residential cleaning services. The scoping process was intended for stakeholders to help identify specific areas of the standard to be researched or included in the next step of the project, development of a proposed standard. This is the first of several steps where stakeholders can provide input on the development of the standard. Comments were solicited from the diverse stakeholders including operators, users, and general interest groups. This document includes a summary of the comments received.

By participating in Green Seal's standard setting process, the following organizations played an important role in Green Seal's effort to encourage the design, manufacture and end use of environmentally superior products. Their assistance and involvement is greatly appreciated.

Comments received from these organizations:

Association of Residential Cleaning Services International
HomeWize
Maid Brigade

Scope (standard category)

Comment:

In my opinion, using GS-42 as a base to create a residential standard is the most appropriate and easiest way to approach standardization. The floor care SOP would have to be altered. However, there are many alternative Micro Fiber mopping solutions that would fit our industry. Micro Fiber Flat Mop heads use the least amount of water and product and clean effectively. Our difficulty was developing SOP's for different floor, bathroom, and counter surfaces. There are more on the market everyday and it is tough to develop a limited line of solutions for all surfaces. It is also tough to stay "green" when the vendors recommend their specific cleaning solution to use on their product. It requires us to be very educated on surfaces, knowing what will not damage them. The bigger task is educating the customer to trust us as the expert and let us use our products.

Comment:

I agree with you. The GS-42 pattern has been my guideline in effectively utilizing residential cleaning standards. I have found it to be thorough and comprehensive. Another website with an extensive amount of information is www.lead.net. This has a wide-range of current information you may find helpful.

Definitions

Comment:

I think that a standard description should be developed so that we distinguish the differences between a residential cleaning service and a commercial cleaning service and limit our definition to the cleaning of residential homes. We are not carpet cleaners, movers, organizers, etc., and feel we must develop standards excluding these other tasks.

Comment:

To an extent I have to respectfully disagree with you. While residential green cleaning standards are a need, my business can not receive a commercial certification because we also service residential, and vice versa. While I understand that your business is more broad than a typical residential cleaning company my standards for residential cleaning need certification also. In my opinion, our services are in and of themselves green by reducing the amount of time, costs and resources typically required for three to four billings for each home I service we provide.

While the residential services scope needs to remain, to some extent provisions also need to be made for companies with a more diverse portfolio.

Cleaning procedures and plan

Comment:

Before initiating a specific cleaning procedure for my residential and commercial cleaning business I researched the typical standards for 'Green Cleaning'. Through this I have uncovered some very practical applications. The first is using color coded microfiber cloths for uses is separate areas (e.g. blue for the kitchen, yellow for windows and mirrors, red for toilets, green for bathtubs, white for sinks and vanities). This prevents cross contamination between the different surfaces, and the microfiber cloths are washable and reusable.

In choosing the cleaning chemicals I found the [---] product line which offers multiple applications in one product [---]It comes as a concentrate and by using different dilutions it can effectively be used for mirrors, toilets, tubs, stainless, windows, carpets, tile, sinks and countertops whereby actually reduces the amount of purchasing and unnecessary containers.

I am currently trying to locate a Green Seal certified sanitizer for commercial applications, if there are any suggestions please let me know

Comment:

Currently there is no GS Certified solution that is labeled as a disinfectant or sanitizer. This standard is being set for residential cleaning not commercial. Our residential cleaning franchise has written SOP's as close to GS-42 as possible. We use [---] cleaner which is Green Seal Certified in the bathrooms. They also have [---] Floor Cleaner and

Glass Cleaner that are Green Seal Certified. They have a whole line of [---] Products. The above mentioned are the only GS Certified products. We also follow the color coding system for Micro Fiber Cloths and mop heads. We use [---] and have eliminated tools that are not "Green" such as feather dusters, cotton cloths, etc. Our policy is to be as Green as we can be and educate our employees and customers as much as possible.

Comment:

Although some of the sanitizers have been certified by the [---] as 'Green' I have been unable to locate any sanitizers certified by Green Seal. I did find an extensive list of cleaners that have been GS certified at their web site www.greenseal.org, and [---] is included in that list.

Vulnerable populations considered

Comment:

For the residential certification, I think that the vulnerable populations include (some identical to GS-42 and new suggestions underlined) but not limited to: newborns, infants, children, pregnant women, the elderly, the infirmed and others with compromised immune systems, people sensitive to chemical exposures, pets and residents' guests and service providers. Through primary research we have determined that approximately 60% of our housecleaning customers are pet owners (a higher percentage than customers who are parents, surprisingly). From my own research on green messaging I have observed that scientists tend to agree that pets share many of the same vulnerabilities as children due to their size and proximity to the floor.

Staff training

Comment:

In following the GS-42's SOP's, we developed an employee manual. One manual that explains what Green Cleaning is the benefits, the products and tools and how they work. The second manual is used in conjunction with video that show how to use the new solutions and tools. We have found that training employees in stages is helpful. We then trained all management staff. On the job training was done for a period of a week. Then each employee had to take a test to become "Green Clean Certified." I have found that it does take a lot of continuous monitoring to make sure they understand the solutions, tools, and that it is not an option not to be Green. We have also followed up with Green Training Aids that they see everyday to reinforce the message and benefits to them and their customers.

Comment:

I would like suggest that some provision be included for training of the personnel which come in contact with the customers. We've found that customers can ask questions that might easily catch CSP owners, sales personnel etc. off guard. In order to elevate the meaning of the GS certification, all certified residential cleaning service providers should

be able to articulate essential information about the standards for residential green cleaning solutions, equipment and procedures. Nothing could be as damaging to the value of GS-49 than owners who claim GS-40 certification yet can't effectively articulate the basics of those standards to customers or to the media or anyone else seeking information about GS's residential cleaning standard. We require our owners to undergo green cleaning training as well, for this very reason.

Equipment maintenance plan

Comment:

[---] has provided us with a maintenance plan for the chemical dispenser which is a quarter plan. [---] has supplied us with a manual for a maintenance plan for our vacuums. In our shop we take a more aggressive plan with our vacuums to keep them clean and prevent break downs in the field. We change the paper filter daily and all vacuums and power heads are serviced and cleaned weekly. Our company has found the using the recourses of your [---] was critical in the education and implementation of a true Green program.

Chemical use requirements

Comment:

For credibility, we use 3 Green Seal Certified solutions from [---] line of products. Glass Cleaner, Peroxide Cleaner and Floor Cleaner. [---] is not certified, however, you will find, that there is not a true degreaser that is GS Certified. We also follow GS-42's standard that all chemicals must be dispensed by a dispenser and not manually to avoid inappropriate dilution rates. We also do not use any Ready to Use products, except for Oven Cleaner. There is no GREEN oven cleaner. We tell our clients that want their oven cleaned that we perform the task, but we will be bringing a non-green product in their home. We do not allow our staff to use any other products even if the client asks us to use them. Because of the toxic chemicals used in furniture polish, we do not use it at all. We found the Micro Fiber Cloths extremely effective while dusting. We monitor our teams' buckets and cars to make sure that no "contraband chemicals or tools are being used. It would be nice to find an alternative solution to cleaning ovens that is "Greener" and effective.

Waste requirements

Comment:

While cleaning for preparation for a new tenant often I will have to remove trash, or some small furniture. Any furniture in decent shape is donated to a local nonprofit thrift store. The other debris is divided for recycling. I ran across a janitorial cleaning cart with wheels that holds three color coded recycling bags. It is a very efficient and stream lined process for aiding in recycling.

Comment:

Removing large items of trash and furniture are usually not required for residential cleaning services. Our insurance limits us to not moving anything over 25 lbs and we do not let our team members clean anything that requires higher than a 2-step ladder for safety reasons. We collect trash throughout the house and use plastic bags that are from recycled materials. We do not however, take the trash with us. Many communities have their own requirements regarding recycled items. Our policy is to only collect trash in made from and recyclable bags and put it in the customer's receptacle. Most customers are required to separate their own trash. For the safety of our employees I would not want them to separate trash in the customer's home.

Comment:

The services that we offer are tailored to Realtors and Property Managers. We are a full service post-occupant debris removal and cleaning company. Because of this I am responsible for the recycling and potential reuse of debris left behind. All items contained in trash bags remain in trash bags and are deposited at the refuse center. Every thing else left in the home is sorted and properly recycled.

Floor care

Comment:

Please include carpet cleaning under the floor care category. Carpet cleaning is a large industry of over 40,000 businesses many of them looking for green seal certification. In recent year the carpet cleaning industry has made a serious effort to reduce or eliminate the use of hazardous chemicals.

Communication requirements

Comment:

In addition to the applicable carry over from GS-42, I propose that 6.1.4 be revised to include materials that define opportunities for home occupants to reduce their exposure to health risks "in-between cleaning visits by their provider". If a customer comes behind us a few days later to touch up floors, counters, bathrooms etc that have collected new dust, dirt, germs etc. and they are using non-GS cleaning solutions/methods they will not be realizing the full benefit they sought by hiring a green cleaning service in the first place. Unlike a commercial building, a fair amount of cleaning by occupants occurs between cleaning service visits in a home since the vast majority of customers have children and/or pets.

General comments

Comment:

It is a noble and responsible thing to prepare guidelines and standards to protect people. It is common in the USA for people to spend most of their time in an indoor environment. Sadly, the [---] and other reputable organizations have determined that many of our indoor environments are breeding grounds for pathogens that make the places we live and work danger zones as much as or more than any terror that someone else could perpetrate. It is vital that this Standard respect and recognize that the public looks for solutions to create and maintain better indoor environments.

While we certainly want to use products and methods that have the least environmental impact that definition must include science that supports efficacy of cleaning performance. We must understand that ineffective cleaning products or procedures can be as dangerous as any other inappropriate environmental stewardship.