

# Greening Bloomington Hospital

*A Q&A on the affect of green cleaning on patients and staff.*

By: Mike Sawchuk

Hospitals around the world are slowly jumping on the green bandwagon.

Some facilities have investigated newer and more sustainable power sources, such as wind power, that can help to reduce a facility's carbon footprint.

Others have developed elaborate recycling programs, installed water-reducing or no-water restroom fixtures and taken other steps to minimize their impact on the environment.

However, when it comes to the use of green cleaning chemicals, hospitals and other health care facilities have been slow to make the transition.

John Freeman, director of environmental services at Bloomington Hospital in Bloomington, Indiana, provides a glimpse into how the green cleaning process can evolve and be cost-effectively implemented.

## ***When did you first start the process of transferring to green cleaning?***

Freeman: We have been considering this for a while and actually started the process in 2008. The hospital had been looking to upgrade its cleaning systems and this opened the door for us to investigate green cleaning and see if it would work for us.

## ***What Concerns Did You Have About Green Products?***

Freeman: Performance and costs were at the top of our list. In selecting green cleaning products, we considered, among other things:

- How they could positively or negatively impact the hospital's infection rate
- The potential for cost savings and the products' impact on time and labor



From left to right: John Freeman, Patty Ruble and Susan Kinser with Bloomington Hospital.

- Vendor and distributor serviceability and assistance.

## ***Are there areas of the hospital where you are not using green cleaning chemicals?***

Freeman: There are government regulations requiring the use of conventional disinfectants in certain areas, such as surgery suites, emergency departments, patient bedsides and bathrooms, where there is a potentially higher vulnerability to the spread of germs.

## ***Once you started using the green chemicals, was there any initial reaction from the staff or patients?***

Freeman: Throughout the facility, there was a much more pleasant scent. Our patients noticed it, as did administrators and our environmental services team.

There is always some hesitancy to change to new cleaning products of any kind, but we made sure our environmental services team was involved with the process from the start, testing the products and evaluating them.

As they came to realize the products were as good as, if not better than, what we were using before, they took ownership of the products and became our most enthusiastic supporters for them.

We initially budgeted a cost increase of about 6.5 percent to cover the costs of the environmentally preferable cleaning chemicals, but we now think we will actually lower our chemical and labor costs by 8 to 13 percent by using the green cleaning chemicals.

## ***What advice do you have for other hospitals and cleaning professionals involved in hospital cleaning?***

Freeman: Get everyone onboard when considering the transfer to green cleaning chemicals. Most importantly, this includes the cleaning staff because they are the ones that will be using the products every day.

If there is an infection control committee or product review committee at the hospital, they also must be involved with the process from the start.

Additionally, finding a distributor that is well-versed in green cleaning who knows the products available can be invaluable. The distributor is your guide, educator and conductor orchestrating the green cleaning process. *CM*

*Mike Sawchuk is the vice president and general manager of Enviro-Solutions, a manufacturer of green cleaning products.*