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Cleaning Industry Veteran Talks Green

By Dawn Shoemaker — posted 08/17/2011



Michael Schaffer knows the professional cleaning industry inside and out. Starting on the dealer side of the business more than 30 years ago, he now heads Tornado Industries® and CFR for Tacony Corp., both manufacturers of professional cleaning equipment and recycling carpet cleaning extractors. He has also seen trends in our industry come and go...and stay.

Recently Schaffer was asked to discuss one trend that not only has stayed, but changed the cleaning industry for good: green cleaning. The following are excerpts from that interview:

Mike, what do you see as new in green cleaning products and technologies now and moving forward into 2012?

Green and sustainable cleaning practices are intertwined in the professional cleaning industry, and now, due to global shortages, water conservation is increasingly becoming an element of green focus as well. In the future, it will impact the way we clean both carpets and hard-surface floors. However, moisture controlled cleaning technologies are already helping the industry minimize water use, thereby becoming both greener and more sustainable.

For instance, wand systems are available that can actually optimize and control the amount of water that comes into contact with the carpet in the cleaning process. Historically, portable extractors have used significant amounts of water. In reaction to growing demand for greener carpet cleaning processes, extraction systems that recycle and filter both water and solution several times are now available. As you can imagine, this can result in a dramatic water savings.

When it comes to hard floor care, cylindrical brush floor care technology and even units that use little or no chemical are helping to reduce water and chemical use, again making them greener and more sustainable. These systems can also reduce the amount of waste generated in the cleaning process, which amounts to tons of equipment, tools, and parts ending up in landfills each year. As an example, the brushes on cylindrical units can replace as many as 100 floor pads.

To what extent are your companies involved in green cleaning?

Our focus is professional cleaning equipment: carpet extractors, floor machines, and vacuum cleaners. In each category, we are continually working on equipment that does four things: has less impact on the environment; uses natural resources more responsibly; meets the needs of our end customer, the cleaning professional; and results in equipment that is competitively priced.

The more time and effort we put into research and developing this kind of equipment,

the more interconnected we find them to be. Effective cleaning does not need to be expensive, harm the user's health, waste natural resources, or negatively impact the environment. In fact, we find just the opposite to be true.

Do you see any new green cleaning regulations coming up those building service contractors should be aware of?

Although there are several items I could mention, I believe Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design—or LEED—and the ISSA Cleaning Industry Management Standard-Green Building (CIMS-GB) programs are at the top of the list. These standards have had a very big impact on manufacturers of professional cleaning equipment, and it will have even more impact on cleaning professionals. For instance, one of the requirements is that the noise level of certain types of cleaning equipment used be under 70 dB. This has forced some manufacturers to go back to the drawing board and find ways to quiet their vacuum cleaners and other machines. We must remember that green is not just about the environment. It is also about protecting the health of the cleaning professional.

Where do you see green cleaning going in the next two or three years?

I believe a growing part of green cleaning will become water conservation. Water shortages and concerns are not going away and will likely impact business profits, production, and the ways businesses do everything from cleaning to cooling their facilities in future years. As a result of global shortages, water will also likely become far more expensive in the coming years.

Moreover, not only will organizations strive to be socially responsible through cleaning and in general business operations, but they will also begin to change their purchasing practices to account for the "triple bottom line." This new triple bottom line procurement process will take into account (1) people, (2) products, and (3) the environment. Products must demonstrate functionality and environmental responsibility, and they must do so at competitive prices.

The jansan industry obviously plays an integral role in transforming the way people clean, and I believe you'll see an evolving focus from simply facility appearance to a new focus on facility health and environmental responsibility.

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