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## Will Blue Be the Next Green?

**By Doug Berjer** posted 01/24/2011

Just when cleaning professionals have embraced green cleaning, they are now being asked to take things a step further and become more sustainable— not only in the way they perform their cleaning tasks but also in the ways they conduct their businesses. Green cleaning has been referred to as a “journey,” and it is becoming very clear

sustainability is the next stop.

### **Carpet Concerns**

At this time, what it means to clean facilities and operate a cleaning business (whether a manufacturer, distributor, or contractor) in a more sustainable manner is in the formative stages. However, one segment of our industry may be more impacted by the sustainable evolution than any other: carpet cleaning technicians.

The reasons for this are actually quite simple. Truckmount carpet extractors, whether they are vehicle-powered or have their own powerhouse, can use large amounts of fuel. Manufacturers are aware of this and have been working to develop more fuel-efficient systems for the past few years.

However, what may become of even greater concern in the near future when it comes to sustainability is not fuel but water. Cleaning carpets can consume huge volumes of water.

Although it can vary, a conventional, portable carpet extractor may use as much as one gallon of water per minute. If a typical carpet cleaning job in a residential home takes 45 minutes to complete, that amounts to 45 gallons of water just to handle that one job.

Assuming six carpet cleaning jobs per day, this one technician will require 270 gallons of water each day to perform his or her cleaning tasks. If the technician keeps a six-day workweek, as so many carpet cleaners do, we're talking 1,620 gallons per week, topping out at 7,290 gallons per month, or approximately 87,480 gallons per year— just for this one technician.

### **Is Water an Issue?**

At the start of each year, several experts from all industries and walks of life make their predictions for the upcoming year. One prediction for 2011 that has caught some green experts somewhat by surprise came from author Jerry Yudelson, widely recognized as one

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of the leading green building experts in the United States. His prediction was this:

-Blue [referring to water] will become the new Green in 2011. Awareness of the coming global crisis in fresh water supply will continue to grow, leading building designers, managers, and service providers to take further steps to reduce water consumption to increase sustainability."

Of course, Yudelson's prediction should not come as much of a surprise to those aware of water issues. The Center for Strategic and International Studies, a U.S. think tank, reports that water scarcity is set to become the world economy's single most pressing resource crisis in years to come. And the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has joined the chorus as well. They predict that at least 36 states will face water shortages within five years because of a combination of rising temperatures, drought, population growth, or simply unwise use of water.

It should also be noted that with predicted water shortages, we can expect the cost of water to increase. One reason for this is that existing water infrastructure is simply unable to meet current demands or expand for the future. Some experts say it will cost about US\$300 billion for the next 30 years to upgrade this infrastructure, which most likely will come from increased water fees.

#### **Carpet Cleaners on the Front Lines**

Because water is so essential to carpet cleaning, carpet cleaning technicians are going to be on the front lines of the blue movement, looking for ways to use water more responsibly. In some cases, this may mean suggesting to their clients that extraction not be used in some cases or in every situation but that a dry system be used instead. Some facilities have reported remarkable success using a dry carpet cleaning system two or even three times before turning to extraction. This may not be appropriate in all situations, but where possible, it can obviously reduce the amount of water used for carpet cleaning fairly dramatically.

Manufacturers of truckmount systems have already developed systems that can hold water longer during periods of inactivity. And whereas finding ways to improve the truckmounts' efficiency and power has always been the key concern of truckmount engineers, developing innovative ways to use water more efficiently is now moving to center stage.

As to portable extractors, the most water-stingy systems available refilter and recirculate cleaning solution. At least one manufacturer reports that with their system, water/cleaning solution can be recirculated up to seven times before it must be replaced with fresh water. Quite obviously, this results in a significant water savings.

#### **Comparing Stones and Water**

We often read articles that predict a dire future. Many writers and newscasters believe it is the best way to get the reader's attention.

That is certainly not my goal here when discussing water. There are challenges ahead of us, but carpet cleaning technicians and the manufacturers of carpet cleaning equipment are already taking steps to address these challenges.

This reminds me of a comment made more than ten years ago by Amory Lovins, chief executive officer of the Rocky Mountain Institute. He said: "The stone age did not end because the world ran out of stones and the oil age will not end because the world ran out of oil."

What Lovins was saying is that human beings are innovative, adaptive, and creative. Our industry will find ways to address water issues, especially when it comes to carpet cleaning, before it's too late. In fact, in many ways, they already have.

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