

What is Safely and Sustainably clean?

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What do the words 'hygienically clean' mean to you? If you were to ask five different people, you would be likely to find five different and passionately held views. If you were then to ask these same people to interpret the term 'safe cleaning in childcare', they might take a Work Safe approach (prevent slips, spills and strains), a food safety or infection control angle (minimise germs and cross infection), or a toxicology perspective (avoid exposure to toxic cleaning chemicals). But surely 'safe cleaning in childcare' should also address the sustainability of the environment - where reducing waste, water and energy consumption are the key concerns? After all, it is the children in care who will inherit this planet and its problems. Is it possible to balance all four of these concerns?

Concern and confusion

While conducting training sessions about 'Safer Cleaning Practices,' as founder of Fresh Green Clean, I met with a lot of confusion and concern about safe cleaning and disinfection in children's services. It was frustrating not being able to answer the two most pressing questions:

Which products are really safe?
Which safe methods really work?

The reason these questions are so hard to answer is because there is no National Standard or mainstream labeling program in Australia to help us know which brands are 'environmentally safe'. At the same time, it is also difficult to say which specific brands are *not* safe. Although there are lists of toxic chemicals known to be used in cleaning products, manufacturers are not legally required to tell us every ingredient they've used.

Safer solutions

Fortunately some answers are on their way. Fresh Green Clean has received generous funding from the Sustainability Fund, managed by Sustainability Victoria, to conduct a project called Safe and Sustainable Indoor (SASI) Cleaning. This cutting-edge research project has commenced in four childcare centres in the City of Yarra and includes the Lady Gowrie Child Centre Melbourne. The criteria and rating system being developed by the National Centre of Sustainability will help us to determine which products are safe and sustainable.

The SASI Cleaning Project has a very active team, including two faculties from Swinburne University:

- The Faculty of Life and Social Sciences is addressing the question - *do cleaning products really work?* They will be testing the effectiveness of safe cleaning methods directly in childcare centres.
- Swinburne's Faculty of Design is helping Fresh Green Clean turn these research findings into an interactive, fun and user-friendly program.

The City of Yarra and the Lady Gowrie Child Centre are providing practical support, while representatives from the National Childcare Accreditation Council and Community Child Care ensure SASI Clean complies with the regulations and guidelines.

SASI Clean Program

By the end of 2007, this project will have produced an education program called SASI Clean that will empower childcare staff to create high levels of hygiene with minimum risk to children's health, their own health or the environment. Centres that participate and comply with the SASI criteria will be endorsed and listed on the SASI Clean website. Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Melbourne will be one of the first to receive this endorsement, and parents can have the confidence that their child's health and their planet's future are being protected.

You can help

We welcome your involvement. SASI Cleaning project is taking an 'action research' approach, which means that your questions will help to inform us about which answers we need to find. Please visit our new website at www.sasiclean.com.au and, whether you are a staff member or parent, share your opinions about safer cleaning with us.

Email us at:

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