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**C**hange. It is something that for most of us we would rather avoid. No matter what causes a change, most of us would rather keep things just the way they are. We get used to the way we conduct our daily routines – from the stores we frequent to the friends that we associate with to our daily eating habits. Human nature is such that we tend to fight change.

Sometimes, however, the forces of change come from outside sources and it causes not only people, but industries to change. For many years people assumed that asbestos provided many benefits. While there was no doubt about the benefits of the product, it became apparent that when a large percentage of retired workers started dying, we realized that there were some serious health issues and things had to change. The asbestos industry has never recovered.

WestJet, Jet Blue and Southwest have changed the rules of the airline industry. They have promoted “cost before comfort” and have changed the rules for an entire industry. Mainstream airlines are struggling to survive.

Our reaction to change in the cleaning industry is no different. We get used to the way we clean the bathrooms, wash the floors or vacuum the carpets. We have developed processes, products and procedures that are tried and true. They have withstood the test of time and they have proven themselves. Of course, every year the industry invents new things. A new machine that increases productivity; a new procedure that makes the ‘old way’ seem truly obsolete. A new cleaning solution or floor finish that makes the old way ‘outdated’. All of these changes that take place almost always have a positive impact on our industry.

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# Winds of Change Blowing in the Cleaning Industry

**WHAT CHANGES ARE TAKING PLACE IN THE INDUSTRY**

Lately, however, there have been changes happening outside 'our circle' that have the potential to dramatically change the way we look at and work in the cleaning industry.

A good example of this is a book entitled "Our Stolen Future." Written in 1996 by Theo Colborne, Dianne Dumonoski and John Meyers, it out-

lined, among other things, that there are a group of chemicals known as "endocrine disruptors" that were thought to have such a dramatic effect on the reproductive habits of fish, wildlife and many other species, that it began a worldwide study of these kinds of chemicals. Scientists from Canada, the United States, Asia, Australia and Europe have all reached the same conclusion: endocrine dis-

ruption is a serious, proven problem that needs to be addressed – NOW! It is conceivable that endocrine disruptors have the ability to change the reproductive systems of entire species, possibly even humans. If you would like to learn more about endocrine disruptors, you can get more information at Environment Canada's web site at [www.ec.gc.ca/eds/fact/ed\\_e.pdf](http://www.ec.gc.ca/eds/fact/ed_e.pdf).

**WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW**

As a result of these worldwide studies on endocrine disruption, the City of Toronto (in 2000) adopted a new by-law which places strict requirements on effluents discharged into the municipal sewer system. This by-law (which is now being adopted by many other municipalities) is considered one of the most stringent sewer use by-laws in North America. The specific pollutants of interest in our industry include: nonylphenols, nonylphenol ethoxylates, alkyphenols and alkyphenol ethoxylates. (These ingredients are commonly used in many cleaning agents).

In May 2003, the European Commission proposed a sharp tightening of safety rules that would force manufacturers to prove their products are safe for humans and the environment, or take them off the market. Currently, only substances put on the market after 1981 have to undergo safety testing, leaving an estimated 100,000 chemicals in use for which the effects on humans and the environment are unknown. Should this legislation go into effect, it will have a massive impact on our industry. Raw materials currently in use by almost every manufacturer would now have to undergo massive testing to prove their safety or else they would have to be taken off the market.

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Along this same line, in England, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution said "...we need to wake up to the fact that we are all contaminated by certain synthetic chemicals and are living in an unregulated global chemical experiment. Certain synthetic chemicals used in everyday products, such as cleaners, cosmetics, computers and pesticides means that our food,

homes, workplaces and bodies are being contaminated and yet no one knows the full, long-term implications."

Some of their recommendations included:

- That hazardous, man-made chemicals should be urgently substituted with safer alternatives.
- Where synthetic chemicals are found in elevated concentrations in

biological fluids... and the tissues of humans... regulatory steps should be taken to remove them from the market immediately.

In April 2003, the British Columbia Buildings Corporation, responsible for maintaining approximately 3500 buildings released a document outlining proposed changes to many cleaning solutions that might be used to clean their facilities. While these changes may or may not eventually come into effect the mere release of this document has caused many in our industry to look at what they are doing.

The proposed list of banned ingredients is a long one – a list that affects everyone – manufacturers, distributors and cleaning custodians as well. Additionally, the proposed changes mandate to potential suppliers that they be able to substantiate claims such as biodegradability, aquatic toxicity tests and VOC limits. Third party verification will be mandatory. Whether these changes get mandated or not remains to be seen, however, one thing remains certain – the days of "trust me, it's safe, green and biodegradable" are over. Proven, third party verification will soon be the order of the day.

At the Federal Government level, in November 2002, Public Works Canada released a Janitorial Workbook. The 68-page document outlines and discusses such issues as:

- Is there a problem?
- Are cleaning products dangerous?
- What is happening in North America?
- Evaluating cleaning products.
- What ingredients should you avoid.
- What ingredients should you try to substitute.

There are many other interesting

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aspects presented in this document. There are interesting Internet links to many other sites that will help you address whatever safety or environmental concerns you might have.

**SO HOW CAN YOU EDUCATE YOURSELF?**

If all this potentially industry-changing information is coming from sources outside our usual circle, then how or where can you go to get solid,

unbiased information about the potential known or suspected safety hazards about the products that you might currently be using.

One of the most interesting web sites out there is sponsored by the Environmental Defence League. They are a science based organization, operating out of Washington, DC. Among other things they were responsible for the banning of DDT. They have developed a part of their

web site simply known as SCORECARD. Scorecard was developed to help people understand the health effects of common synthetic chemicals. The exact web site address is [www.scorecard.org/chemical-profiles/](http://www.scorecard.org/chemical-profiles/).

All you have to do is input the CAS number from any chemical solution listed on your MSD sheet and it will tell you about any known or suspected health effects associated with that particular ingredient. This can be a very interesting process to go through. The results might surprise you – even with ingredients that a lot of people assume are “environmentally sound.” Just because it might be good for the environment does not necessarily mean that it is good for humans.

You may also want to visit [www.wrppn.org/Janitorial/jp4.cfm](http://www.wrppn.org/Janitorial/jp4.cfm) which is the web site for the Western Regional Pollution Prevention Network. You may read about some very interesting facts about the cleaners that we use and how we can protect custodian’s health, as well as possible means of preventing pollution.

From a Canadian perspective, one of the more interesting web sites is the Labour Environmental Alliance Society. Based in Vancouver, the LEAS is a collaboration between labour and environmental groups. Together they realize that there is clearly a link between health, cleaning products and the environment. They have a very interesting and educational part of their web site about cleaners and toxins. You can view it at [www.leas.ca](http://www.leas.ca).

The Federal Government also has set up the Environmental Choice program. Their web site is [www.environmentalchoice.ca](http://www.environmentalchoice.ca). This program has been around for a number of years and outlines products and services that meet certain standards. The latest standard (as it



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relates to cleaning products) to come out is PRC-097. Considered by many to be the most stringent environmental standard currently in existence, PRC-097 deals specifically with Cleaning Products with Low Potential for Environmental Illness and Endocrine Disruption. In order to be granted this specification, cleaners must meet many specific criteria. Some of these criteria include:

- No labelling under the Hazard-

ous Products Act.

- VOCs less than 0.05 per cent by weight.
- Biodegradable under both aerobic and anaerobic conditions.
- Non-toxic to aquatic life by whole formulation.
- Calculated oral rat toxicity of > 5000 mg/kg.
- Demonstrate minimum potential for endocrine disruption.
- Be listed with a recognized en-

vironmental health organization.

Additionally another Canadian web site offering information is [www.envirodesic.com](http://www.envirodesic.com). Envirodesic™ certification identifies a growing family of cleaning products, healthier buildings and expert services that promote “Maximum Indoor Air Quality™” and sustainability. The Envirodesic™ certification mark is licensed to qualified builders, manufacturers and service-providers whose buildings, products and services meet stringent standards for healthy indoor environments. The Envirodesic team also helps manufacturers develop products that are ecologically sustainable.

The most interesting thing about all of these web sites is that these are organizations that are “outside our industry circle.” As more and more information becomes available, it is likely that it will be the end-users, and not the manufacturers and distributors who will force change. Institutions, government agencies and commercial building owners will look for more products and processes that do not contribute to indoor air quality issues, do not have any known or suspected health effects, and do not have any endocrine disruptors. They will more than likely begin to look for more and more outside, third party verification of any claim that is made.

The Canadian Environmental Alliance Society and Scorecard.org have made the link clear – if it is good for human health, then it must be good for the environment. These two issues go hand in hand. The changes in our industry are coming. IT’S TIME TO BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES and GET READY.

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