



## **Toxics Self-Audit for Religious Institutions**

The purpose of this toxics reduction self-audit is to help you examine the cleaners, pesticides and hazardous substances that you use, and identify ways you can be clean and green. Pages 1 and 2 of this audit ask you questions about your current products and practices; pages 3 and 4 outline easy tips for making your institution safer and healthier.

### **Cleaning Products and Practices**

As we all know, keeping a house of worship or school clean is not only about the products you use, but also the practices that accompany them.

#### **Products**

1. How many different cleaning products does your institution use?
2. Are there opportunities to reduce the number of cleaning products you use by having some products serve double-duty or eliminating a product altogether?
3. Does your institution use commercial cleaning products, such as those purchased from a vendor, or household products, such as Windex or Pine Sol?
4. If your institution uses commercial cleaners, are they certified as 'green' by Green Seal, EcoLogo or Design for the Environment?
5. Has your institution read the MSDS sheet on your commercial cleaners? What hazards are listed there?
6. If your institution uses household cleaners, are all ingredients listed (not just active ingredients)? Also, what kinds of warnings are listed on your cleaners, and which products appear to be the most hazardous?

## **Practices**

1. Are there walk-off mats in all entrances to your building? These mats allow members to wipe dirt off their shoes before entering.
2. Are there areas of the building where soil, mold or significant dust is visible?
3. Does your institution use other green cleaning methods, such as microfiber cloths or mops, HEPA vacuum filters, or others?

## **Pest Control and Lawn Care**

1. Does your institution hire an outside company to spray pesticides, herbicides or other chemical applications inside or outside of your building?
2. If you answered yes to question #1, are these chemical applications done continuously (e.g. once per month) or only on an as-needed basis?
3. If you answered yes to question #1, does that vendor use IPM (Integrated Pest Management) or organic strategies? If not, are there opportunities for the vendor to do so, and have you asked your vendor about this?
4. For chemicals that are applied by your own staff, have you researched non-toxic alternatives, and/or implemented an Integrated Pest Management strategy?
5. Do children or pets visit your building or come in contact with the lawn? If so, how are the children or pets safeguarded from the pesticide applications?

## **Disposal of Hazardous Waste**

1. How do you dispose of the following hazardous waste products?
  - a. Batteries
  - b. Printer cartridges
  - c. Electronic waste
  - d. Paint and pesticides
  - e. Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs)
2. If you currently dispose of any of the above products in the regular trash, are you aware of opportunities to dispose of them properly or recycle them?

## Tips for Creating a Healthier, Safer Religious Institution

Of the 80,000 synthetic chemicals that are used to produce common goods and services, only a small fraction have been tested for their effect on human health and the environment. In addition, pesticides have been found in every body of water in United States (US Geological Survey), and we're all carrying pesticides, flame retardants, heavy metals and other harmful chemicals in our bodies that we've picked up from our surroundings (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

By taking steps in your institution to choose better products and practices, you will help to safeguard your members and staff from these hazards.

### Greening Your Cleaning

Green cleaning is a process of cleaning and operating the building that uses fewer cleaning chemicals overall, and supports healthier and non-toxic chemicals for those that are used. There are some specific steps with green cleaning that are important to follow:

**Look for Certifications:** Commercial green cleaners that are truly green are certified by one of these three organizations: Green Seal, EcoLogo or Design for the Environment. Many companies will claim a product is green, but the only way to be sure is to look for one of these certifications.

**Carefully Select Household Cleaners:** If your institution uses household cleaners (such as Windex or Pine Sol) instead of commercial cleaners, review GreenFaith's tips for home cleaning on our website, which will help you to identify the best cleaners.

**Key Green Characteristics:** In addition to choosing certified green cleaners, it's important to read product labels and MSDS sheets, to look for harmful ingredients. Some good characteristics: No carcinogens, low or no VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds), no or very low phosphates, ammonia or chlorine, no heavy metals, no animal testing, recyclable packaging, biodegradable, provided in a concentrate, and derived from plants.

**Test for Effectiveness:** All green cleaners are not created equal in terms of effectiveness. It's important that your facilities maintenance staff test out several different brands of certified green cleaners, to find the one that works best for your needs. *Note:* New green cleaners are coming out on the market everyday. If your institution has tried a green cleaner in the past that you didn't like, try out some different ones before giving up on green cleaning entirely.

**Train and Educate Staff:** Green cleaners contain different chemicals than normal cleaners, and they often come in concentrate form. If used improperly, they can be ineffective. It's important that facilities maintenance staff are trained and/or educated around the proper use of the product--ask your vendor for training opportunities.

**Practices Are As Important as the Cleaners:** Green cleaning is a process, not just different products. It's important to find better ways of keeping soil and pollutants outside, such as through using walk-off mats in all entryways, and finding ways to clean with less chemicals overall, such as through microfiber clothes or mops.

**Pass a Policy:** Administrators and facilities maintenance staff come and go. Lay the foundation for green cleaning in the long-term by passing a policy and/or resolution that supports green cleaning and clearly outlines the steps that should be taken in purchasing and operations.

For further information on green cleaning, visit Inform Inc ([www.informinc.org](http://www.informinc.org)) or Responsible Purchasing Network ([www.responsiblepurchasing.org](http://www.responsiblepurchasing.org))

## **Pest Control and Lawn Care**

Chemicals that are sprayed inside or outside of your institution linger for extended periods of time in the air and on surfaces, posing hazards to children, pets and the environment. Cut down or eliminate pesticides and other chemical applications, and implement an Integrated Pest Management approach through these easy steps:

### **Assign an IPM Coordinator**

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) requires consistent and diligent monitoring and evaluation of results, so it's important that someone within your house of worship or school be assigned as the IPM coordinator. Facilities maintenance personnel are often best suited for this role, since they know the building inside and out.

### **Learn About IPM**

Over time, IPM becomes intuitive and easy to implement. At first, however, there is a lot to learn. The IPM coordinator and others on the IPM team should read further about the topic, and learn the steps involved. In summary, an IPM protocol should include:

- **Consistent Monitoring and Record Keeping.** How are the pest populations in the building affected by certain measures taken? When, where and in what ways is pest management implemented? Keep detailed logs.
- **Prevention:** What are the ways that pests can be prevented from entering the building in the first place? Sealing up holes and storing food in airtight containers are just two examples of preventative measures. Proper prevention=less pests.
- **Least-toxic Methods.** Traps and other simple steps can help to eliminate pests without chemicals. Opt for the least toxic option first and foremost—visit [www.beyondpesticides.org](http://www.beyondpesticides.org) for more information.

- **Strategy, Communication and Planning:** If chemicals are needed, they should be applied when the building is empty for at least several days. These products should be applied judiciously and precisely, and not sprayed liberally. Your community should be alerted to the pesticide application and be given information about the products used.
- **Certified IPM Vendors:** If your institution utilizes a pest-management company, ask the company about their IPM protocol in written form and talk to them about their products and practices. Aim for companies that are Green Shield certified ([www.greenshieldcertified.org](http://www.greenshieldcertified.org))

### **Clearly Define Goals Through a Policy**

Often, institutions will follow IPM principles until a change occurs, such as a pest outbreak or new leadership. It's important to set clear goals, guidelines and emergency protocols in a policy so that IPM is consistent over time. Create an enforceable list of pesticides that are acceptable for use, the products that will replace toxic chemicals, and guidelines for handling pests in the least-toxic way possible. This policy should be posted publicly, and be given to new staff and administrators that come on board.

### **Celebrate and Publicize**

As your staff grows more comfortable and experienced with IPM, it's time to publicize your vision and successes to your members and the wider community. IPM is often perceived as intimidating at best and impossible at worst, and it's critical that people see successful examples of IPM in action. Send out press releases, post information about non-toxic pest management in your newsletter, or write a letter to the editor. Welcome others into your building for a tour, or host a workshop or forum. Inspire others through your success!

### **Dispose of your Current Pesticide Supply Safely**

Pesticides are considered hazardous waste, so dispose of them properly. Here are the EPA's guidelines:

- If the container is partly filled, contact your local solid waste agency. If the container is completely empty, throw it in the trash.
- To identify your local solid waste agency, look in the government section of your phone book under categories such as solid waste, public works, or garbage, trash, or refuse collection or call 1-800-CLEANUP.
- Do not pour leftover pesticides down the sink, into the toilet, or down a sewer or street drain. Pesticides may interfere with the operation of wastewater treatment systems and pollute waterways. Many municipal systems are not equipped to remove pesticide residues.

## **Disposal of Hazardous Waste**

Hazardous waste represents some of the most toxic substances to human health and the environment. Making the effort to dispose of these products properly is a critical step to keep our families and communities safe.

- The website [www.earth911.com](http://www.earth911.com) is invaluable for finding recycling opportunities in your neighborhood for a variety of odds and ends. The website also provides information for cleaning up spills and breakages.
- Many towns now offer opportunities to recycle or dispose of hazardous waste. Contact your local town officials.

Good luck on your toxics reduction efforts! Contact GreenFaith with any questions:  
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