



Disinfectant Use in Green Cleaning Programs

Disinfectants and sanitizers are used in most cleaning programs. Disinfectants are usually the most hazardous chemicals that custodians use. They are not cleaners and are not covered by the Connecticut (CT) law that requires CT facilities to use green cleaners. So even though you are using them, they are not “green certified”. Disinfectants and sanitizers should be used only according to your cleaning plan, in high risk areas, or where required by law.

This is how the U S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explain the difference among cleaners, sanitizers, and disinfectants:¹

- “Cleaners or detergents are products that are used to remove soil, dirt, dust, organic matter, and germs (like bacteria, viruses, and fungi). Cleaners or detergents work by washing the surface to lift dirt and germs off surfaces so they can be rinsed away with water. The same thing happens when you wash your hands with soap and water or when you wash dishes.”
- “Sanitizers are used to reduce germs from surfaces but (do) not totally get rid of them. Sanitizers reduce the germs from surfaces to levels that (are) considered safe.”
- “Disinfectants are chemical products that destroy or inactivate germs and prevent them from growing. Disinfectants have no effect on dirt, soil, or dust.”

Here are some tips on disinfectants.

- ▶ **Use in high risk areas.** Certain areas such as rest rooms, nurses’ offices, some parts of athletic facilities, and hospitals need disinfecting. The label will say what germs the disinfectant are designed to be used for (H1N1 flu virus, tuberculosis bacteria, etc.).
- ▶ Frequent cleaning of high touch areas (door knobs, push bars, railings etc.) **using an all-purpose green cleaner and microfiber cloth** (without any disinfectants) can get rid of over 90% of the germs. Floors and other areas usually need to be cleaned but not disinfected (unless an infection control plan says to disinfect).
- ▶ **Know where disinfecting is required.** Disinfecting or sanitizing is needed for some areas in child care centers, hospitals, food service facilities and for cleaning up blood spills.
- ▶ Reduce the use of disinfectants by:
 - **Cleaning with an all-purpose cleaner before you disinfect.** Disinfectants work better when you get rid of dirt and other hiding places for germs.
 - **Using microfiber mops and cloths to clean.**
- ▶ **Don’t move germs from one area that you have cleaned to the next.** For example, if you use a microfiber mop, remove the used mop pad and put it in a bag to launder *before* moving to the next room or area. Put a clean mop pad on when you get to the next room or area.

¹<http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/environment/index.html>



- ▶ **Follow the label directions.** If using a concentrate, make sure the chemical is mixed with the right amount of water. Disinfectants must be left wet on the surface for the right amount of time in order to kill germs. Wipe or rinse the surface if it says so on the label. The label may have the “dwell time or contact time.” The dwell time is the amount of time needed for a disinfectant to remain glistening wet on a surface in order to kill 99.999% of microbes on a hard surface.
- ▶ **Know how to protect yourself.** Bleach is good at killing germs but can also hurt your breathing and can combine with other chemicals like ammonia or “quats” to make a dangerous gas. Bleach is not used in most green cleaning programs. Accelerated hydrogen peroxide is a safer disinfectant.
- ▶ **Learn about new technologies.** New ways to disinfect may become available that use less hazardous chemicals. New equipment like steam machines and water-based devices can clean, sanitize and disinfect.

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