



Tools of the Trade

Clean up Your Act

School nutrition operators provide some inside dirt on choosing chemical cleaning products.

BY PATRICK WHITE

Elbow grease is all well and good, but when it comes to cleaning and sanitizing school nutrition kitchens, a health inspector will insist that effective cleaning products are also part of the equation. After all, specialty cleaning chemicals can kill bacteria and cut through grit and grime like no amount of scrubbing alone can do. While not as glamorous as some other school nutrition-related purchases—like a new convection oven or POS system—cleaning products are a critical part of running a safe, spotless operation.

With so many surfaces to clean—counters, floors, pots, pans, sinks, tableware, etc.—shopping for the right combination of chemicals might seem daunting. But the three directors interviewed for this article all have found convenient ways to purchase cleaning supplies that work in their programs.

Cape Elizabeth (Maine) School Department The school nutrition team in this district recently found a new cleaning products supplier—one with a “green” bent. “We now buy our cleaning supplies from Swish Maintenance,” reports Peter Esposito, child nutrition director. Before the switch, multiple suppliers provided an array of cleaning chemicals to the district.

Swish offers both a general purpose cleaner that now takes care of much of the district’s cleaning needs, as well as specialty cleaning products, including many environmentally friendly options. In addition to its own cleaning products, the company offers materials from Enviro-Solutions and other suppliers.

“We just put a lot of work into establishing a recycling program here, so it really seemed to make sense to use more eco-friendly cleaning products,” explains Esposito. “And they turned out to be

cheaper than what we had been using, as well.” (As an added eco-benefit, he points out, Swish is based in Maine, which means that delivery of the supplies to the district leaves a smaller carbon footprint.) At Cape Elizabeth, the same cleaning solution works for dish rags, counters and beyond, simplifying decisionmaking for staff. And getting everything from the same company makes re-ordering easier, he adds.

Swish also installed dispensing units to control portions, which helps save costs and makes it easy for employees, Esposito notes. “You just put your bucket underneath, and it does everything automatically.” The company’s Dilution Enhancement System holds containers of various cleaning products and dispenses the correct ratio for the desired application. This saves money and adds further environmental benefits by ensuring use only of the amount of cleaning product needed.

The new cleaning products were a little different than what the district formerly had been using. For example, the warewasher detergent is a liquid rather than a solid brick. “[The company] came in and provided training and set everything up,” recounts Esposito, who reports no difficulty in the transition. To supplement that training, the

You’re the Expert

A snapshot of the districts that shared their experiences and advice on chemical cleaning products in this month’s column:

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| ■ Cape Elizabeth School Department
Cape Elizabeth, Maine
Website: www.cape.k12.me.us
Director: Peter Esposito
District enrollment: ~1,500
Number of schools: 3
Daily lunches (reimbursable): ~530 | ■ Hancock County School District
Kiln, Miss.
Website: www.hancock.k12.ms.us
Director: Natalie Cuevas
District enrollment: ~4,400
Number of schools: 6
Daily lunches (reimbursable): ~3,600 | ■ Savannah-Chatham County
Public Schools, Savannah, Ga.
Website: www.savannah.chatham.k12.ga.us
Director: Altheria Maynard
District enrollment: ~34,000
Number of schools: 48
Daily lunches (reimbursable): ~22,000 |
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Swish website includes an “e-learning” component cleaning products and techniques, as well as tips and quizzes regarding safety requirements.

While Cape Elizabeth staff sometimes use a special stainless steel polish at the end of the school year, all other cleaning products now come from a single source. Most important, says Esposito, “They work great.”

Hancock County (Miss.) School District Natalie Cuevas, director of child

nutrition for this Mississippi district, says that when she looks for cleaning supplies, what she’s really looking for is peace of mind.

“Our state child nutrition office tested various products, and they recommended PortionPac’s SFSPac program,” she explains. “We love the system—it works great. We use it for our sanitizer, pot-and-pan cleaner, all-purpose detergent, degreaser—you name it. They also have a germicidal [detergent] that we use.”

PortionPac created the SFSPac program specifically for the K-12 school market, and Cuevas says it meets her operation’s needs exactly. “We have a year-long contract, and we pay a certain monthly fee for all six of our school sites,” she explains. “[The company] gives us training, and [representatives] come in monthly to replenish our supplies. They even do a review, going through the kitchens to check the sanitizer and make sure it’s up to code and that it tests properly. Then, they send me a monthly report for each site. It’s nice, because I don’t have to constantly check our supplies and get on the phone to reorder—it’s

Chemical Cleaning Products

Following is a list of some companies that offer cleaning products and supplies to foodservice operations.

- Ecolab, Inc.
www.ecolab.com
- Par-Way Tryson Co.
www.parway.com
- PortionPac/SFSPac
www.portionpaccorp.com
- Spray Master Technologies
www.spraymastertech.com
- Swish Maintenance, Ltd.
www.swishclean.com
- The Malish Corporation
www.malish.com

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Robot Coupe Overall
BEST IN CLASS
2009
Food Processor Winner 2007-2009

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U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council

Blueberries

Check out our free menu activity sheets and other school materials on the website. Send your order to info@blueberry.org.



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done automatically. I wish everything worked that easily."

The district is required to get two other quotes before making any purchases, and Cuevas reports that the SFSPac program offered the best price. She thinks that's partly due to the carefully portioned packaging at the heart of the system. "If you order a case of bleach or dishwashing soap, employees tend to overuse it. With this system, you only have to use one package," she explains.

PortionPac also makes the district aware of any new products in its line, which Cuevas says helps her keep up to date without having to constantly research the topic herself. "If there's a new product, they'll give us samples to test. Then we can decide if we want to order it," she explains.

While the convenience is a nice feature, Cuevas says it's the knowledge that the SFSPac program keeps her sanitation up to par that's most comforting. "I know it's safe. Our state tested and approved it—it takes a lot of worry off me," she credits. "It's dependable and it works."

Savannah-Chatham County (Ga.) Public Schools With some 34,000 students to serve, this district's child nutrition program needs all of its equipment, tools and supplies to perform at the highest levels all the time. That includes its cleaning chemicals. Recently, though, the district found that the performance of those cleaning supplies was lagging, and it switched—returned, actually—to a different line of products.

"We do a competitive bidding process for our cleaning supplies. We bid sanitizers, dish detergents, pot-and-pan sink cleaner, floor cleaner, glass cleaner, oven cleaner, freezer cleaner and so on. It all goes out as one bid," explains Altheria Maynard, school nutrition program director. For many years, the district used Ecolab for those cleaning supplies, in part because the company was part of a state contract program.

Not long ago, a different supplier took over the job of providing the district's cleaning chemicals, but Maynard says that the quality of the supplies—and the service—suffered. "Now, we're back with Ecolab," she reports. "We've found them to be really superior products."

The cleaning chemicals are delivered with corresponding MDS data sheets, as well as with dispensing units. "They also provide onsite training. And their materials are available in both English and Spanish," says Maynard. "Ecolab also comes in monthly to inspect the machines and then issues a monthly report about what they've found in the schools."

The dispensing units vary in style depending on application, but they all portion out the correct amount of cleanser and sanitizer, she notes, adding, "They're metered—when you pump, a set amount of material comes out." The metering ensures that chemicals are not overused by employees, which saves money. And because the cleaning supplies used by the Savannah-Chatham district generally come in bulk liquid form, there's not as much worry about the product "walking out the back door" as can happen with pre-packaged products.

Maynard says she's requested that Ecolab supply "green" cleaning products whenever possible. While that's not a requirement in the district, "We know it's coming and we just want to get on the bandwagon before it becomes mandatory," she explains of her department's decision to use environmentally friendly products. **SN**

Patrick White is a freelance writer in Middlesex, Vt., and a former assistant editor of this publication.