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Cleaning for Health and Wellness

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Corporations are investing millions of dollars on employee wellness programs. They are giving employees incentives to do things like lose weight, quit smoking and reduce stress. The goal of these programs is to reduce healthcare costs and absenteeism due to illness, which in turn, boosts productivity.

Ironically, at the same time, many forward-thinking corporations spend little time or thought connecting the cleanliness of their facilities to their robust employee wellness programs. Typically, cleaning is viewed as a commodity and the selection of a service provider is based on price rather than the capability of providing a service that enhances the overall wellbeing of the occupants; the same goal as employee wellness programs.

How does this happen? Traditional cleaning specifications are based on tasks and frequency of services with agreed upon productivity rates. When cost cutting occurs, it seems easy to simply cut the cost of cleaning and reduce the frequency of tasks. This practice is commonly referred to as “cutting” the scope of work. However, this practice fails to see the contribution the service provider makes in occupant health and wellness within the building’s indoor environment. In many cases, cutting scope is counterproductive to the overall employee wellness program, because the service provider plays a major role in collection, removal and prevention of the transmission of pathogens throughout the indoor facility. Furthermore, these reductions limit the role that the service provider may play as the first line of defense against contaminants that make people sick or compromise the indoor air quality.

Many attribute the recent trend of cleaning for health and wellness to the evolution of green and sustainable cleaning protocols. Forward-thinking service providers know that following such protocols is a way to positively affect the quality of facilities that their employees work in on a daily basis. Additionally, service providers can obtain reputable third-party certifications in order to reassure facility managers that a chosen provider is qualified to perform all tasks well and within a cleaning for health framework. These certifications have also given service providers credibility in the cleaning for wellness discussion and expanded the impact cleaning has on occupant health.

It is important for corporations to understand the link between cleaning and their employee wellness, not only in the short-term, but the long-term as well. During the widespread outbreak of MRSA and Swine Flu in the winter of 2008-2009, Dr. Richard Besser, past Director of the CDC’s Coordinating

Office for Terrorist Preparedness and Emergency Response, stated, “For Americans to truly be healthier they must live, work and play in environments that promote healthy choices and behaviors.” Infectious outbreaks continue, so it is not about *if* an outbreak will happen again, but *when*. Dr. Besser cautions that we must view our vigilance in this area, “Not as a race, but as a marathon.”

Although cleaning for appearance will continue to act as a benchmark to rate the perception of cleanliness, with doing so, the anticipated benefits of employee wellness programs will always be limited if the cleanliness of their facilities are not made a priority in an overall employees wellness program. It is the responsibility of corporations to become the advocates for the numerous benefits of cleaning for wellness and to communicate the role of the service provider as a vested partner in assisting to promote occupant health.

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